JOURNAL OF THE IRISH CHRISTIAN STUDY CENTRE

ARTICLES

Sheridan Gilley — *A Prophet Neither in Ireland nor in England (The C. S. Lewis Lecture)*

Robert Dunlop — *Culture and the Church in Ireland*

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REVIEWS
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A Prophet Neither in Ireland Nor in England

(The Third C.S. Lewis Memorial Lecture, 25th October, 1985)

by SHERIDAN GILLEY

Jesus said that 'No prophet is accepted in his own country'. My presence with you this evening might seem to prove the contrary of Clive Staples Lewis. Yet in different senses both his native Ireland and his adopted England have rejected him: having both rejected what, following the greatest of English Presbyterians, Richard Baxter, he called 'mere Christianity', by which he meant that vast body of essential doctrine and belief which all Christians hold in common. Indeed the phrase might serve to recall to us Richard Baxter's own labours for Christian reunion, and the fact that while he fell short of full charity to Roman Catholics, he shocked his fellow-Protestants by denying that the Pope was Antichrist. In Lewis we have the worthy modern heir to Baxter, and I can think of no twentieth-century writer who commands a larger devoted readership than Lewis among Christians of all kinds, from Evangelicals to Roman Catholics. Yet it is in Ulster that Christians seem most unable to acept that they do have a common ground, the ground which Lewis defended against the liberals and sceptics in England who most despise them.

Indeed I am not sure how many of his readers outside Ulster would know he was an Ulsterman, and I cannot see that the Province had much direct influence on his work or did anything to make him a Christian. He denied that he had satirized the Ireland of his childhood as Puritania in *The Pilgrim's Regress* when the claim was made by his Roman Catholic publisher,[1] yet in 1931, he summarized his objections to Irish Christianity to the closest of the Irish friends of his adolescence, Arthur Greeves. What was wrong with it, he declared, was:

> *(1) That the system denied pleasures* to others *as well as to the votaries themselves: whatever the merits of* self-*denial, this is unpardonable interference. (2) It inconsistently kept* some *worldly pleasures and always selected the worst ones — gluttony, avarice, etc. (3) It was ignorant. It could give no "*reason *for the faith that was in it". Your relations have been found very ill grounded in the Bible itself and as ignorant as savages of the historical and theological reading needed to make the Bible more than a superstition. (4)"By their fruits ye shall know them". Have they the* marks *of peace, love, wisdom and humility*

on their faces or in their conversation? Really, you need not bother *about that kind of Puritanism. It is simply the form which the* memory *of Christianity takes just before it finally dies away altogether in a commercial community: just as extreme emotional ritualism is the form it takes on just before it dies in a fashionable community.*[2]

Again, Lewis's brother and life-long friend and companion Warnie describes Lewis's conversion to Christianity as no sudden thing but "a slow steady convalescence from a deep-seated spiritual illness of long standing — an illness that had its origins in our childhood, in the dry husks of religion offered by the semi-political church-going of Ulster".[3] Thus Lewis's return to Christianity sprang not from his ancestral Protestantism but from those stabs of joy as from another world experienced in reading Norse mythology: for his response to the gods of Valhalla, he wrote, "contained elements which my religion ought to have contained and did not . . . Sometimes I can almost think that I was sent back to the false gods there to acquire some capacity for worship against the day when the true God should recall me to Himself."[4] All that Ireland gave towards this was the beauty of landscape, especially in the Wicklow mountains, where Lewis came to see the wonder of his new mythological Wagnerian world, "here a steep hillside covered with firs where Mime might meet Sieglinde, there a sunny glade where Siegfried might listen to the bird . . . "[5] Even the Ulsterman with the profoundest influence on Lewis, his tutor Kirkpatrick, the 'Great Knock of Great Bookham' in Surrey, was an atheist, albeit a very Presbyterian one. "He always, on Sundays, gardened in a different, and slightly more respectable, suit. An Ulster Scot may come to disbelieve in God, but not to wear his week-day clothes on the Sabbath."[6] What Lewis got from Kirkpatrick, apart from his classical training, was what he called his Dialectic, an ability to argue from fundamentals and to spot drivel a mile off and cry "Stop!" It was through this education in how to argue that the Ulster Atheist made the future apologist for Christianity; but Kirkpatrick taught him how to argue not what to argue for.

Thus if Ulster did little for Lewis's conversion, it must also be said that he became a Christian at Oxford among friends who were, or became, either Roman or Anglo-Catholics. *Surprised by Joy* is dedicated to an Oxford pupil who was to win a modest fame as Dom Bede Griffiths, a monk of Downside Abbey, and Lewis's most epoch-making friendship in the University was with the Roman Catholic Professor of Anglo-Saxon, J.R.R. Tolkien, whose fame as the author of works of fictional fantasy now even exceeds that of Lewis. It was Tolkien who, in Lewis's own words, taught him to overcome his two primary prejudices, never to trust a papist or a philologist. Again it was with the help of Tolkien and Tolkien's friend Hugo Dyson that Lewis found the truth of Christianity in his earlier fascination with mythology, in recognizing in Christianity a mythology which happened to be true. Again, it was a recent convert to Roman Catholicism, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, who first made sense to Lewis of the Christian outline of history. To the atheist Lewis, Chesterton was "the most sensible man alive 'apart from his Christianity'"[7]

and it was Lewis who succeeded Chesterton as the plain man's apologist for orthodoxy, and kept the clear sharp outlines of basic Christian doctrine alive for another generation of ordinary believers.

Yet Lewis never followed Chesterton to Rome, to the distress of Tolkien, who considered the title of Lewis's *The Pilgrim's Regress* ironical: "Lewis would regress," he wrote. "He would not re-enter Christianity by a new door, but by the old one: at least in the sense that in taking it up again he would also take up again, or reawaken, the prejudices so sedulously planted in childhood and boyhood. He would become again a Northern Ireland protestant."[8] Indeed Lewis always remained in appearance the Ulster farmer; and a passage that he marked in Newman's *Apologia* was Newman's dismissive reference to the Irish William Palmer, that he "had never really grown into an Oxford man".[9] His writings unite an Ulsterman's strength of conviction with a literary grace and music which may have come from his Welsh descent, or be of Southern Irish provenance; but I would not call it Oxonian. Certainly his Oxonian Catholic friend Tolkien had first hand experience of the nativist Ulster prejudice which Lewis had to outgrow. He and his brother were capable of referring to Irish Catholics as 'bog-trotters' or 'bog-rats' as other Anglo Saxons refer to 'niggers'; and Tolkien was deeply hurt by the tone and temper of Lewis's instinctive bristling rebuff when the professor spoke of his own devotion to St. John the Evangelist. "We stumped along the cloisters," Tolkien recalled, "and I followed feeling like a shabby little Catholic caught by the eye of an 'Evangelical clergyman of good family' taking holy water at the door of a church."[10] This last phrase, an 'Evanglical clergyman of good family', is Lewis's own slightly satirical description of his Church of Ireland clerical grandfather, a former chaplain of Holy Trinity Church, Rome: surely the Vatican was in his parish? And while Lewis never came to share Tolkien's devotion to the saints, he complained in his final work, the *Letters to Malcolm,* that "the 'low' church *milieu* that I grew up in did tend to be too cosily at ease in Zion," and that grandpapa, in looking forward to "some very interesting conversations" with St. Paul in heaven, never foresaw "that an encounter with St. Paul might be rather an overwhelming experience even for an Evangelical clergyman of good family. But when Dante saw the great apostles in heaven they affected him like *mountains.*"[11]

"There's lots to be said against (Catholic) devotions to saints," Lewis concluded, in declaring that this was not for him, "but at least they keep on reminding us that we are very small people compared with them." He thought that such prayers *to* the holy dead *could* be lawful, and he had no compunction about praying *with* them, "With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven."[12] In this, as in the other issues dividing the Churches, as in his own habit from 1950 of making his private confession to an Anglo-Catholic priest, or in his long correspondence with an Anglican nun, Lewis moved from his original Protestantism in a Catholic direction towards the centre of the Christian tradition. In this, he tried to make sense of the whole of the orthodox inheritance, and to find the mean between what

the Church of England Prayer book calls too much refusing and too much admitting.

The creative use by Lewis of the no-man's land between the Churches is possibly best illustrated by *The Great Divorce,* which expounds the neglected notion of the *refrigerium,* a respite in which souls from hell are given a chance of heaven. They enter a paradise as a kind of purgatory, for as evil has unmade or disembodied them, so they find intolerably hard the very grass of the lovely celestial landscapes which surround them. But is their situation still unsure, and a real choice of heaven or hell still before them? "My Roman Catholic friends would be surprised," remarks Lewis, "for to them souls in Purgatory are already saved. And my Protestant friends would like it no better, for they'd say that the tree lies as it falls." Lewis gets an answer of sorts from his guide, the Victorian Congregationalist clergyman George MacDonald, whose fantasy novels had been to Lewis another opening to Joy: "They're both right, maybe. Do not fash yourself with such questions . . . What concerns you is the nature of the choice itself . . ."[13] Ought not that phrase, 'Do not fash yourself', be written on tablets of stone or plates of gold in Ulster, with the gloss that such differences of opinion are not only uncertain and endlessly debatable in themselves, but that there is something much more important, the common ground on which Catholics and Protestants agree?

What Lewis perceived with uncanny accuracy and foresight was that the modern world contains a phenomenon infinitely more sinister than Ian Paisley or the Pope, and that is the common enemy of all good Christians, the evil which I can only call in the vaguest terms liberalism, which leads to what Lewis called 'the abolition of man' in the name of an ultimate ethical and religious relativity. You can tell a Christian terrorist that he is violating his own Christian convictions; but it is difficult to show a man without morals that he can be violating anything at all. Yet Lewis's starting point was rather the modern abolition of God, in his own discovery that the inconsolable longing which had come to him in myth and fantasy, the Joy for which he watched and waited, was ultimately futile without an object:

> *I perceived (and this was a wonder of wonders) that just as I had been wrong in supposing that I really desired the Garden of the Hesperides, so also I had been equally wrong in supposing that I desired Joy itself. Joy itself, considered simply as an event in my own mind, turned out to be of no value at all. All the values lay in that of which Joy was the desiring. And that object, quite clearly, was no state of my own mind or body at all.*[14]

Lewis saw that his essential mistake had been to desire the subjective sensation of Joy instead of Him who gave it. For "a desire is turned not to itself but to its object. Not only that, but it owes all its character to its object . . . The form of the desired is in the desire . . . It is the object that makes the desire itself desirable or hateful."[15] And so religious experience is like all other experience, not an end but a key or clue or an opening to something

other, indeed as Lewis came to see, as an avenue of divine self-disclosure, in which God reveals and offers Himself.

Thus Lewis identified his original error in the modern elevation of subjective experience over objective truth; and in his lectures on 'The Abolition of Man', delivered in the University of Durham in 1943, he unveiled the modernist snare of Satan in the apparently innocuous statement, by two schoolmaster authors of an elementary textbook on English, that when we call a waterfall sublime, we are speaking simply of our own emotions and not of a quality belonging to the waterfall itself. On this basis we merely *feel* that a waterfall is sublime, but being sublime is not an objective property of the waterfall. Thus beauty is only a matter of cultural conditioning and individual taste, as are all ultimate moral and spiritual values. Lewis opposes to such subjectivity the notion of *Tao* or the way, a universal body of moral and spiritual truths, antecedent to Christianity, which constitutes a kind of logic or grammar in terms of which the human reason has always interpreted the world. In all cultures there is a witness against lying and murder; as Lewis wrote in a later essay, 'The Poison of Subjectivism':

> *If a man will go into a library and spend a few days with the* Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics *he will soon discover the massive unanimity of the practical reason in man. From the Babylonian* Hymn to Samos, *from the Laws of Manu, the* Book of the Dead, *the* Analects, *the Stoics, the Platonists, from Australian aborigines and Redskins, he will collect the same triumphantly monotonous denunciations of oppression, murder, treachery and falsehood, the same injunctions of kindness to the aged, the young, and the weak, of almsgiving and impartiality and honesty. He may be a little surprised (I certainly was) to find that precepts of mercy are more frequent than precepts of justice; but he will no longer doubt that there is such a thing as the Law of Nature.* [16]

Of course, Lewis declared that while the Law of Nature was universally acknowledged, it was also universally disobeyed. In this, everyone falls short of what everyone must partly know. Yet the enormous underlying realm of sheer agreement outweighs any differences, and though a particular culture may be lamentably defective in one or other of the truths of the *Tao*, there is a sufficient common factor among all human cultures to tell us what all mankind believes. "Those who know the *Tao* can hold that to call children delightful or old men venerable is not simply to record a psychological fact about our own parental or filial emotions at the moment, but to recognise a quality which *demands* a certain response from us whether we make it or not."[17] Lewis, when he wrote this, did not relish the society of young children, but he recognised this as a kind of colour-blindness in himself to a truth of the *Tao*. In short, the proper emotional reaction to the *Tao* may be present in an individual by grace, nature, or education: but the value is not simply a result of instinct nor is it reducible to our subjective response

to it, for it existed before us and exists beyond us, and like God it abides forever.

Thus, a philosophy, Lewis wrote, in 'The Poison of Subjectivism',

> *which does not accept value as eternal and objective can lead us only to ruin . . . Many a popular 'planner' on a democratic platform, many a mild-eyed scientist in a democratic laboratory means, in the last resort, just what the Fascist means. He believes that 'good' means whatever men are conditioned to approve . . . he does not yet fully realize that those who create conscience cannot be subject to conscience themselves. But he must awake to the logic of his position sooner or later; and when he does, what barrier remains between us and the final division of the race into a few conditioners who stand themselves outside morality and the many conditioned in whom such morality as the experts choose is produced at the experts' pleasure? . . . The very idea of freedom presupposes some objective moral law which overarches rulers and ruled alike. Subjectivism about values is eternally incompatible with democracy. We and our rulers are of one kind only so long as we are subject to one law. But if there is no Law of Nature, the ethos of any society is the creation of its rulers, educators and conditioners; and every creator stands alone and outside his own creation.*
>
> *Unless we return to the crude and nursery-like belief in objective values, we perish.* [18]

Lewis's expertise in moral discourse had been sharpened by his great scholarly work on the personified abstractions of medieval allegory; and he insisted that we lose something when we abandon the use of such language. Yet the truth of the elementals of ethics was something self-evident to him, as set forth in the very first of Chesterton's Father Brown stories, 'The Blue Cross'. Father Brown declares:

> *Reason and justice grip the remotest and the loneliest star. Look at those stars. Don't they look as if they were single diamonds and sapphires? Well, you can imagine any mad botany or geology you please. Think of forests of adamant with leaves of brilliants. Think the moon is a blue moon, a single elephantine sapphire. But don't fancy that all that frantic astronomy would make the slightest difference to the reason and justice of conduct. On plains of opal, under cliffs cut out of pearl, you would still find a notice-board: "Thou shalt not steal".* [19]

Father Brown is lecturing the great criminal Flambeau, who is masquerading as a priest: but Brown knows that he is not a priest, for he attacks reason, which is 'bad theology'. For like Chesterton, Lewis insists that justice, like theology, is rational: not in the sense that the moral law can be proven by

reason, but that in itself it provides the first principles of that Practical Reason which we must assume if we are to prove anything moral at all.

Lewis, like Chesterton, embodied his teachings on the ultimate evil of subjectivity in fiction, in his science fiction novels, *Out of the Silent Plant* and *Voyage to Venus,* and above all in *That Hideous Strength,* a study of the corruption of Bracton College, Edgestow, which as he says in the Preface to the work, "has no resemblance, save for its smallness", to the University of Durham.[20] The principal villain, Frost, wishes to reduce everyone else to his own blind subjectivity, though he is in the hands of diabolical powers beyond his own complete imagining. He hopes to harness to N.I.C.E., the National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments, a semi-scientific instrument for enslaving the nation to the Devil, the mysterious force of the Celtic magician Merlin who lies buried but still sleeping under Bragdon Wood. Yet Merlin, when awakened, becomes the focus for the awakening of the virtue of that other ideal buried Britain, Logres, a theme suggested by Lewis's Anglo-Catholic friend, the poet and novelist Charles Williams. Logres is the sleeping embodiment of all that is best and highest in the national spirit, and Merlin's resurrection heralds the defeat of evil by bringing down fire from heaven. For human resources by themselves are unavailing. When Merlin asks what good is left in the world, he is told that the Saxon king at Windsor is powerless, that the "Faith itself is torn in pieces . . . and speaks with a divided voice", that only one in ten of the population is Christian, and that there are no other Christian Princes and no Emperor.

> *'If all this west part of the world is apostate (protests the magician) might it be lawful, in our great need, to look farther . . . beyond Christendom? Should we not find some even among the heathen who are not wholly corrupt? There were tales in my day of some such: men who knew not the articles of our most holy faith but who worshipped God as they could and acknowledged the Law of Nature.*[21]

His hearer has to disillusion him: "The poison was brewed in these West lands, but it has spat itself everywhere by now". Above all, it is ascendant in the University, though the teachers there never thought anyone would *act* on their theories: all the philosopher's lectures were "devoted to proving the impossibility of ethics, though in private life he'd have walked ten miles rather than leave a penny debt unpaid."[22] Lewis insisted that he had written about the corruption of a College not because dons were likely to be more corrupt than anyone else, but because he knew his own profession best. On the other hand, he did feel intensely the *trahison des clercs,* even in his own University, and he points to the modern tendency of the priests of the shrine, the guardians of the tradition, to betray it from within. The worst of these traitors were the Liberal theologians, so active among his fellow Anglicans. "Liberal Christianity can only supply", he concluded, "an ineffectual echo to the massive chorus of agreed and admitted unbelief . . . did you ever meet, or hear of, anyone who was converted from scepticism to a 'liberal' or 'demythologised' Christianity?"[23] Such a Christianity was like Arianism, the

special prerogative of a highly cultivated clergyman and *clercs manqués:* while the orthodox Athanasius stood where his disciples still stand today.

Indeed since Lewis wrote, the *trahison des clercs* has gone as far as he had foreseen in his Church and mine, the Church of England, in which the generation of clerics who have ruled since Lewis's death have sapped the very foundations of his 'mere Christianity'. There are, of course, some honourable exceptions to the rule, but in general the powers that be within the Church have happily administered the closure of thousands of parishes, and have acquiesced and even assisted in the relativisation and paganization of popular culture and the wholesale destruction of the disciples of home and family life. The people of England have been robbed of their religion and morals at least in part by their religious and moral leaders, in a wholesale National Apostasy from Christian faith and Christian ethics. The last bishop of my diocese, now archbishop of York, defended abortion. The present bishop is too notorious to require an introduction. And with this has gone a ruthless subversion of the doctrinal content of the Faith, in the name of that very subjectivity in which Lewis saw the flames of hell.

He was, of course, familiar with Modernist Bishops; as with the notorious Barnes of Birmingham, himself the persecutor of men more orthodox than he, whose biography has recently appeared under a title — *Ahead of his Age* — encapsulating the very worst of the liberal chronological snobbery which Lewis loathed. In *The Great Divorce,* he drew an immortal picture of a liberal Bishop, who refuses the glories of heaven for denying him the liberty to speculate. This prelate is told that there is no "atmosphere of inquiry", for heaven is "the land not of questions but of answers", "of the face of God". But the Bishop objects that "The free wind of inquiry must *always* continue to blow through the mind, must it not? 'Prove all things' . . . to travel hopefully is better than to arrive". "If that were true, and known to be true", is the reply, "how could anyone travel hopefully? There would be nothing to hope for".[24] In short, the Bishop's outlook is rooted not in 'honest opinion', but in a wholly intellectual pride which Lewis thought the very worst of all sins, and which the Bishop will not even sacrifice for the Beatific Vision, preferring to read papers to his Theological Society in hell. "When", he says, "the doctrine of the Resurrection ceased to command itself to the critical faculties which God had given me, I openly rejected it. I preached my famous sermon. I defied the whole chapter. I took every risk!" "What risk?" comes the response. "What was at all likely to come of it except what actually came — popularity, sales for your books, invitations, and finally a bishopric?"[25] Now I cannot quite say this of our bishop, who was quite unknown, a minor provincial professor, until the offer of a bishopric thrust infamy upon him. But he, of course, has denied the doctrine of the Resurrection by turning it from an objective event into a subjective faith experience of rising in spirit with the Lord: and it is he who has come to symbolise the very worst of our modern theological subjectivity, in conjunction with academic arrogance and pride. I think Lewis was right to locate the heart of this treason in the heresies of New Testament scholarship,

of which he said that it was bound to make an uneducated man either an atheist or a Roman Catholic. At the moment in the church of England, it is making large numbers of *educated* men Roman Catholics; and I have recently discovered for myself that in Lewis's words, being "Missionary to the priests of one's own church" is an embarassing role; though, he concluded, "I have a horrid feeling that if such mission work is not soon undertaken the future history of the Church of England is likely to be short."[26]

I have said that Lewis regarded much liberalism as demonic. It is well to remind ourselves that he came to Christianity through the intensity of his vision of heaven, that 'The Weight of Glory' is surely one of the greatest sermons in our language, and that outside the Revelation of St. John the Divine and Dante, there can be few anticipations of paradise more moving than the last chapter of *The Last Battle,* or the last lines of *A Grief Observed.* Yet the clarity of this picture is the other side to the intensity of his vision of hell, the description of self-devouring selfhood in the *Screwtape Letters* and the endless waste of bleak mean rainy streets which opens *The Great Divorce.* There is a saying of Kierkegaard, that communication may either give us information or change us from what we are; and Lewis's works are pervaded by the sense of the agony of the naturally egotistic and selfish soul in its struggles to escape from its own selfhood, its petty self-preoccupations, lusts, pride and self-obsessions, and the desperate reality of its choices for or against Almighty God. Lewis constantly reminds us that every other human being is created for either bliss or torment. In this, reading Lewis can, God willing, help to change us from what we are. To read Spenser, he said of his best loved poet, is to grow in mental health, and like Spenser, he is a gracious writer in the older sense of that lovely word, as one whose writings convey the grace of God. And he has, I believe, the answer alike to English infidelity and Irish bigotry in 'mere Christianity'. What both nations need, in different manner and measure, is the orthodox eirenic which he preached; and my prayer for both England and Ireland is that in both his visions may he find a home.

NOTES

1. Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Biography* (London 1974), p. 130.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
3. W.H. Lewis (ed.), *Letters of C.S. Lewis with a Memoir* (London, 1966), p. 19.
4. *Surprised by Joy* (London, 1955), p. 78.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
8. Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien, A Biography* (London, 1977), p. 151.
9. J.A.W. Bennett, *The Humane Medievalist. An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 5.
10. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings. C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and their friends* (London, 1978), pp. 51-2.
11. *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (London, 1964), p. 23.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.
13. C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce: A Dream* (London, 1972), p. 63.

14. *Surprised by Joy,* p. 208.
15. *Ibid.*
16. C.S. Lewis, 'The Poison of Subjectivism', in *Christian Reflections* (London, 1967), p. 77.
17. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man: Riddell Memorial Lectures, Fifteenth Series* (Oxford and London, 1943), p. 11.
18. 'The Poison of Subjectivism', pp. 80-1.
19. G.K. Chesterton, 'The Blue Cross', in *Stories, Essays and Poems* (London, 1965), p. 19.
20. *That Hideous Strength* (London, 1972), p. 5.
21. *Ibid.,* p. 180.
22. *Ibid.,* p. 243.
23. *Letters to Malcolm,* p. 152. See also 'The Modern View' in Clyde S. Kilby (ed.) *A Mind Awake: An Anthology of C.S. Lewis* (London, 1968), pp. 219-34.
24. *The Great Divorce,* p. 40.
25. *Ibid.,* p. 37.
26. C.S. Lewis, *Fern Seed and Elephants and other essays on Christianity* (London, 1975), p. 125.

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Culture and the Church: Appropriate Expressions of Christianity in the Context of Ireland Today

by ROBERT F. DUNLOP

The Ireland of modernity offers a serious challenge to the Christian communicator in general and to the faith community in particular. Because the good news is articulated most effectively out of a worshipping body which is biblically informed and spiritually inspired, the *kerygma* of the proclaimer cannot be totally detached from the *koinonia* of the church. The Thessalonican model as adverted to by Paul in I Thess. 1:3-10 shows the significance of the local community of faith, characterised by "work of faith, labour of love and patience of hope", who became "imitators of us and of the Lord" and "examples of all those who believe". Out of such an atmosphere "from you has sounded out the Word of the Lord".

Before a theory of evangelisation is placed on the agenda of contemporary churches it is necessary to bring a number of related matters within the purview of the discussion. These include the cultural, sociological and religious changes which are altering the landscape of modern Irish society. As the good news does not arise out of a theological/cultural vacuum, neither does it arrive in a sociological no-man's-land. The failure of Christian communicators and communities to become aware of and acclimatized to the cultural matrix which is being impacted with Gospel ideas and values creates confusion and imbalance. Since all Christian witness works out of an organized scheme of ideas and pre-suppositions, a particular set of values and world-views, the criterion of adequacy must be applied to these ideals from time to time. Because of the rapidity with which new modes of thought are appearing on the Irish horizon it is time for Christians to pause and reflect. If the traditional methods and emphases which have been used as the legal tender of evangelicalism are not subjected to re-evaluation and are stubbornly retained at all costs, there will be an absence of spiritual interfacing with the thought patterns of the potential receptors. When this happens relevance goes out the window and the audience just looks the other way. Torrents of abusive rhetoric usually flow from the wounded witnesses who go on the defensive and blame the non-registration of the message on the hardness of the hearers rather than the obscurantism of the bearers.

Self-criticism of the structures, methods, language and emphases used by ecclesial communities is a priority in the present climate. This must

happen if we are to succeed in scratching where the itch is strongest and in healing where the hurt is deepest. Ireland desperately needs a fresh philosophy of evangelism married to a church delivered from fear and poised for action. The most innovative initiatives which might arise out of outdated structures or inadequate models are insufficient to meet the present case or to answer the questions of the time. Therefore religious entrepreneurs who are only concerned to operate within the existing structures cannot deliver a fully relevant, registering word. One of the issues facing Christians in every generation is whether their way of expressing the ideas, truths and values of the Gospel is adequate or appropriate. Our problem in most parts of Ireland is to incite communities and congregations to pose the question. So much is taken for granted that outworn modes and outdated methods are employed without anxiety or apology. The difficulty is compounded when the 'communication' is occurring in an alien cultural setting, leading, inevitably, to a collision of interests and a faulty and untidy reading of the message. In proposing a corrective strategy it may be helpful to indicate the areas where there are obvious inadequacies and also to itemise the factors which are conducive to constructive change.

1. *Christianity must be expressed in such a way as to come to terms with historical conditioning*

Christianity is both a social and historical faith. Cradled in a Jewish matrix, it developed decisively within the history of a covenant people. The Lucan writing which we call the Acts stresses the idea of a faith continuum, especially in the public speeches it records, while also reporting the conflictual elements which emerged when the church started to organize a separate existence and ethos. On assuming the mantle of the historical identity of the Hebrew people, Christianity took on, in a modified form, the *Heilsgeschichte* of the chosen people. This ensured that Christianity, even when operating with universal categories and penetrating into new and alien cultures, could still affirm its rootage in real-life events and flesh-and-blood realities. It also provided Christians with a vision of the Kingdom of God, on the one hand transcending all cultural manifestations but on the other hand "coming" within the historical process. Furthermore, it compelled Christian strategists to display an awareness of and a sensitivity to the cultural consciousness of the receptors of the *kerygma*.

Ireland is an impressive and tragic example of a gigantic failure on the part of pro-church and para-church organizations to take history seriously. It is not unusual for Irish missionaries of various traditions to show a concern for the ethnic, social and religious formation of the people to whom they are ministering abroad, and at the same time to ignore the claims and contributions of history in the homeland. Within evangelicalism there has been a tendency to narrow the focus of interest to the theological realm and to evaluate attitudes and responses from an exclusively doctrinal premise. The result of this tunnel vision is the kind of static, detached assessment

which for example, judges Irish Catholicism only from the perspective of the heavily polemicised and reactionary statements of the Council of Trent. Unless there is an attempt to analyse how the Tridentine theology reached the Irish Church, how far it penetrated into the religious consciousness of the people and in what ways it is being questioned or rejected in the wake of Vatican II, there can be no intelligent or realistic response to the challenges of Irish Catholicism. Historical research will show that Roman Catholicism in the post-Famine era became increasingly monolithic through the influence of Tridentine theology, Jansenistic spirituality and Utramontane ecclesiology, largely through the efforts of Cardinal Paul Cullen. It is possible to argue that this mold has been broken and that an internal collision has taken place between Trent and Vatican II. It may be as ludicrous to assume that a housewife in South Dublin is bound by the Decrees of Trent, as to presume that a factory worker in West Yorkshire is impelled by the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion!

Dangerous pre-suppositions are also made concerning the origin and development of Protestantism in Ireland. Largely through successive plantations Protestantism arrived on Irish soil and because of the political preferences of these religious settlers, they were given agricultural and social prestige at the expense of the native Irish. Because events happened as they did the Protestant faith was associated with privilege, power and triumphalism in contrast to the egalitarian monotony of the nationals. The Established Church of Ireland gained notoriety in the 19th century colourfully expressed in James Doyle's claim that it was viewed "as a more political than a religious establishment . . . not as the spouse of the Redeemer, but as the handmaid of the Ascendancy."[1] Although Presbyterians and other Dissenters initially made common cause with the ostracised Catholic majority eventually they too were drawn into the power bloc of Protestant resistance which took upon itself the defence of the inalienable rights of the religious minority. Thus historical developments institutionalised polarisation and created an atmosphere of suspicion and resentment. As these attitudes were exploited by political agitation and community violence the religious traditions became so blinkered that they virtually abandoned objectivity. The failure to come to terms with the historical hurts and grievances of the opposing religious tradition removed from Irish Christianity an effective prophetic voice and prevented corporate repentance.

Evangelicals who have functioned within this general milieu have not been notable in their efforts to re-read history without pejorative accretions and must accept their share of the blame for the spiritual stagnation which has afflicted the Irish church. There is now an unprecedented opportunity for them to redress the failures of the past and to come to terms with Irish history in the light of Gospel values so that they can create a theology which is sufficiently distanced from folklore and romanticism to become an

imaginative framework for building the Kingdom of God. In the exquisite statement of South American theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez,

> *it means sinking roots where the pulse of history is beating at this moment and illuminating history with the Word of the Lord of history.* [2]

Unless this is done with the stridency and stringency of a radical movement dedicated to change for the sake of the Kingdom, Ireland will settle back into its old defensive posture where staleness prevails and unreality rules.

2. *Christianity needs to appear in detachment from any ideological system*

It is painfully obvious that Ireland has suffered from the consequences of ecclesiastical attachment to political and social ideologies. In this area the guilt must fall at the door of the two major traditions in both parts of the island. While the Irish shared in the witty castigation of the Church of England as "the Tory Party at prayer", they have not been sufficiently aware of the uncomfortable alliances which have wrought havoc in their own country. Although Ireland has been without a State Church since 1870, there are few other European countries where political religion and religious politics are so powerful.

In Northern Ireland political Protestantism has all but killed the eirenic core of ecclesial life and robbed the churches of their spiritual clout as instruments of reconciliation. In the Republic, meddling Catholic conservatism has repeatedly restrained social legislation and confused the electorate. If Ulster voters stand in awe of Bible-thumping political preachers, Southern legislators cannot ignore the influence of crusading bishops with croziers in their hands. In spite of spirited denials by religious leaders on both sides of the Border the ideological complexion of much Irish religious practice and policy is a serious impediment to the Gospelisation of the social order.

From a Southern perspective the identification of nationalism with Catholicism has produced the kind of social climate in which Irishness is often religiously defined. It is a short step from that position to the sacralisation of the political process. What often happens, in practical terms, is that Canon Law is almost equated with Divine Law and State Law is expected to be subservient to both. While this is not "official" church policy it is frequently the popular understanding of what is happening. An interesting example is the procedure of ecclesiastical annulment of marriage, which the State does not recognize. Those who receive a church annulment are free to enter into a new contract and the church is prepared to bless such a marriage even though it has no standing in law. In this way canon law operates on a higher plane than that of the civil power. Although resisted by large sections of the population there is still the ghost of the Church riding high in the corridors of the Dail. Ulster's dilemma is different. Protestantism

has wedded itself to the political ideology of Unionism and loyalty to the Protestant faith and the loyalist cause are viewed as synonymous. Such a position is irrational from a historical perspective, where evidence is abundant which shows that Irish nationalism had strong Protestant roots. Republicanism which in most other countries is a vital and viable political system, is viewed with almost universal contempt by Ulster Protestants. The outcrop of this kind of thinking is a serious loss of spiritual and politicial impact on the part of the churches. Instead of the church being free to critique the political order and offer Gospel insights, it is so much aligned with the ideology that it becomes part of the disease and is consequently unable to be part of the cure. When this happens, not only is spiritual effectiveness sacrificed on the altar of political expediency but the church is locked into systemic totalitarianism which kills its prophetic impact and stymies its internal renewal. The seriousness of this alliance is described by Belfast minister, John Dunlop:

> *Our Churches are so imprisoned within the perspectives of alienated communities that we find it difficult to provide the prophetic insight which is required by the Gospel. This failure has serious consequences for politics. If we provide an uncritical chaplaincy service for political ideologies we confer a quasi-religious character upon them. Necessary political compromise can be portrayed as the betrayal of a religious trust. Politics need to be desacralised so that they become manageable and in the process the Churches will be set free to be the Church*[3]

One of the most urgent matters to place on the agenda of Christian bodies is the construction of a methodology which will unlock the Christian community from ideological bondage and encourage political pluriformity amongst church members. Such a courageous step will require the initiative of religious leaders who are ready to lead from the front in pioneering a creative spiritual order which will liberate the church and at the same stroke enrich the social and political process.

3. Christianity requires release from bondage to a defined sub-culture

Within evangelicalism, and to a lesser extent among other religious communities where orthodoxy is centralised, there is often an obsession with external conformity to a routinised code of conduct which is regarded as mandatory for all the adherents of an ecclesial group. As presented, this cultural code is assumed to have been underwritten biblically and therefore inviolable. It is regarded as having Divine sanction and is usually not negotiable. Its imposition is normally placed in the hands of ministers and elders who act in solidarity with the community which supports it. It has gained widespread respectability in many countries and often becomes the criterion for assessing the faithfulness of the leaders and the spirituality of the church. In Ireland it appears in its most rigid form in various

denominations and para-church societies in Northern Ireland but also in a less severe form throughout the South. Within the parameters of this sub-culture there is a fairly standard set of practices which are forbidden or considered 'worldly'. These include forms of female dress, dancing, cinema-going, smoking, drinking and in some cases organized sport.

In suggesting that this sub-culture should be abandoned it is necessary to advance reasons why it is not an appropriate way of expressing Christian faith and discipleship in Ireland today. It must be said that the matters under consideration may be real issues in the lives of individual believers and ought to be settled in the court of conscience, informed by biblical principles and practical considerations such as health, time, cost and usefulness.

i. Its imposition removes in a subtle and unintended way the sufficiency of the grace/faith model of salvation. If conversion is conditional on the abandonment of practices which have, in the main, a 'neutral' status in Scripture, there is a logical inconsistency in proclaiming a *sola fide* doctrine of salvation.

ii. Its selective codification damages the concept of the Christian life as a relational experience and a pilgrim journey.

iii. Its 'packaged' spirituality opens the door for legalism which easily degenerates into the 'leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees' which came under the censure of Jesus. Such cauistry is closely related to the classification of sins, such as mortal and venial, in Roman Catholicism.

iv. Its implementation encourages judgemental, negative Christianity and almost inevitably leads to an outright rejection or a patronising attitude to those who fail to conform.

v. Its greatest deficiency lies in its definition of worldliness — the weightier burdens which Christians face, commonly called 'sins of the spirit', are not given adequate stress. Such traits as extravagent life-styles, exorbitant expenditure and materialistic greed are often ignored when the external code is observed.

vi. Its attachment to Gospel values and appropriation by the community of believers confuses those who are searching for a living faith. If they are told verbally that Christ saves on the basis of repentance and faith and are later confronted with a set of practices which are regarded as taboo they may abandon the greater quest because of the intrusion of the lesser issue.

In the new climate of Irish Christian profession it is becoming clear that those who are coming into the circles of faith will increasingly reveal an interest in a series of preferences and practices which are foreign to many conventional evangelicals. Such things as Irish music and dancing, Gaelic games, love of the Irish language, nationalist or republican political allegiances and the observance of national occasions like St. Patrick's Day,

will come to the fore. If these new believers are not accepted for their own sake and accommodated with their cultural and traditional customs, the Church of Christ will be fragmented further and weakened in its impact. Only a church shorn of superfluous accretions can respond adequately to those who are searching for a new spiritual home and waiting to be incorporated unconditionally into the local limb of the Body of Christ. The incisive and somewhat excessive statement of American theologian Langdon Gilkey summarises the argument:

> *Religion developed in another cultural epoch and enshrining their religious ideas, norms and roles in the shape of that past cultural existence can become, when historical changes occur, anachronistic, oppressive, even possibly demonic and certainly irrelevant in the new age.*[4]

4. *Christianity will respond honestly and courageously to changes and challenges within society*

If this is to happen in a meaningful way there must be an end to the kind of obscurantist withdrawal which has pervaded much Irish Christian posturing. In order to instigate a meaningful response it is essential to construct an overview of the new features which are appearing on the Irish scene. These include sociological shifts, ecclesiastical changes, political developments and popular movements.

i. Ecclesiastical changes

Observers of religious trends in Ireland have perceived a significant change in the atmosphere of church life in Ireland since Vatican II. This Council, which is conveniently ignored by those who adhere to a rigid *semper eadem* view of Roman Catholicism, was the most significant change within Catholicism since the Counter-reformation. Because the Irish hierarchy have been slow to implement the teaching of the Council in other than tokenistic ways, it seems to the outsider that Archbishop McQuaid was justified in commenting on his return from the Council — "Nothing has changed".

Within Catholicism there is certainly an awareness of considerable change, and the confusion created in the minds of older church members along with the resistance to the Tridentine rites proves the point. The implications of the break away from dependence upon Thomistic philosophy as a framework for theological definition are far reaching. New visions of church life, of charismatic leadership, of the Kingdom of God as distinct from the church, have arisen out of the theology of Vatican II. The possibilities for significant changes in theological understanding and ecclesial life are more real than at any time since the Reformation. It is now possible to open up fruitful discussions on such central doctrines as Transubstantiation and Justification by Faith with the prospect of a break

in the old dogmatic intransigence. The kind of fresh thinking induced by Vatican II is articulated by David Regan, an Irish priest:

> *A Church, already suffering from excess of authoritarian government requires, above all, leaders who have faith in the dynamism of the Spirit, hidden in the hearts of God's people and only needing the right conditions for growth. Not a heavy hand, but a willing ear; not a vigilant eye but a word of encouragement; not stern teachers, but humble co-learners are what is needed for putting God's people in new touch with the sources of life today.* [5]

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council there have been noticeable sociological alterations in Ireland, and this has created an inviting openness and a growing alienation. The slow drift into the atmosphere of modernity has created something of a crisis of identity within Catholicism:

> *The verdict of the people on the continuing relevance of their ecclesiastical institutions? If the broad front of Catholic religious practice in Ireland only a decade or two ago seemed as solid as an Arctic ice-pack, then it must be said that the melting of that ice-pack is now well under way outside its core in rural Ireland, and that even that core is inexorably shrinking.* [6]

These developments must not be overlooked by those who are concerned with the task of Christianising Irish life by direct, dynamic evangelisation.

While it is prudent not to exaggerate the changes which have taken place, either theoretically or actually, it is also important not to explain them away. The *aggiornamento* envisaged in Vatican II must be seen against the background of Tridentine thought and judged in the foreground of aspirations, tendencies and movements within Irish Roman Catholicism. Vittorio Subilia has given us one of the most incisive studies of Catholicism from the perspective of a Waldensian theologian living and working in Rome. He describes the ecclesiastical thinking which has been institutionalised in Roman Catholicism in such a way as to blockade a massive shift:

> *Every ecclesiology based on the assumption that the Church has been once for all given by God to man, and which therefore takes account only of the Christological element, presupposes a crypto-patripassionism, i.e., a doctrine of God the Son which more or less deliberately overlooks the doctrine of God the Father and centres its attention exclusively on the Incarnation. An ecclesiology based so onesidedly on Christology gives rise to the institutional type of Church, in which the emphasis comes to be set on the Church's constitution by the Jesus of history and to a disproportionate stress on the element of succession as the ground of the divine right of hierarchy and teaching, of priesthood and sacrament. Then the Church conceives of herself as an extension of the Incarnation and elevates*

herself into an institution where truth is deposited, outside of which there is no salvation. She loses her sense of reference to God, the Lord of election, who remains sovereign master of his liberty. Such a Church thinks the dialectic of revelation has come to an end in her; to all intents, she regards the series of the successive times of God's work as at an end; hence in speaking of the time to come, she asserts her jurisdiction over even it, because her self-regarding logic, the logic of a once for all time givenness, includes the eschaton *inside the scope of her ecclesiastical laws. If ecclesiology holds to a sense of the horizontal and historical, and lets go of a sense of the vertical and the eternal, the God of the Church is in danger of being another God.*[7]

Considering the implications explicit in this statement, along with the centuries of tradition which sustained this ecclesiology, it becomes increasingly obvious how major a move was initiated at Vatican II. Therefore, as the old dogmatic rigidity recedes, albeit slowly, so the traditional defensiveness of Protestantism must recede allowing for realistic, balanced and informed evaluations and discussions shorn of negative, destructive polemicism.

ii. Sociological Factors

All Christian work, witness and activity occurs within a social setting. When the landscape alters sociologically, there needs to be a serious attempt by churches to come to terms with the new conditions in which the *kerygma* is offered and in which *koinonia* is practised. In the Republic of Ireland the twin developments of urbanization and secularization have created the kind of social shake-up which must not escape the notice of Christian respondents. The Minister of Finance in the present Dail, John Bruton, has written descriptively of the effects of these developments:

The urbanization of Ireland since the 1950's has undermined many of the subsidiary institutions of Irish life and thus placed ever increasing responsibilities on the Central Government and on those who pay taxes to it. Urbanization has also contributed to a mass of social problems whose alienation still further adds to the burden of Central Government . . . (producing) a society in which closely related families live miles from one another and from their workplaces. This 'distance' undermines the support that the family and 'the neighbours' can give when difficulties arise . . . Urbanization has also meant that people feel less secure in their places in society. Competition in material things, fed by mass advertising, has bred dissatisfaction despite the fact that real income levels are considerably better for most of us.[8]

This major dislocation of the fabric of society presents Christian strategists with several challenges including the brooding loneliness which is found in many of the new conurbations. It also offers a fresh opportunity for Gospel insights, values and promises to bring meaning into an existence

which becomes more routinal and frustrating. In Northern Ireland the political disruption and social unrest has introduced different and often sinister elements into the sociological milieu. Christianity cannot stand aloof from the causes and effects of violence, the ghettoised mentality, the scourges of unemployment and the disillusionment which is endemic in Ulster. As the healing and reconciling agents of the Holy Spirit, Churches are ideally suited to be practitioners and instruments of forgiveness within an atmosphere of hatred and fear. In addition to the light of the world and the salt of the earth stances the Christian presence needs to be expressed in terms of restorative healing which is a sort of Divine alchemy designed to effect a societal transmutation. The cost of this 'third way' will involve the Christian in a vocation which Henri Nouwen describes as "following Christ in the downward path of His compassion".

> *Our vocation is to follow Christ on his downward path and become witnesses to God's compassion in the concreteness of our time and place. Our temptation is to let needs for success, visibility, and influence dominate our thoughts, words, and actions to such an extent that we are trapped in the destructive spiral of upward mobility and thus lose our vocation . . . To follow Christ requires the willingness and determination to let his Spirit pervade all the corners of our minds and there make us into other Christs. Formation is transformation and transformation means a growing conformity to the mind of Christ.*[9]

5. *A Christianity that projects a vision of human existence which is fully holistic*

In terms of a realistic response to the pains and pressures which are discernible in contemporary Irish life, the evangelistic strategist should seek an alignment to a perception of Christian witness which stresses salvific wholeness and is emancipated from all forms of dualism. Spiritual and social insularity and introversion is the product of evangelistic narrowness. There is urgent need to explore fresh categories of concern and to open up new territory of interest for the thrusting dynamic of imaginative evangelisation. Such a development will demand honest, radical and sometimes painful re-assessment and re-alignment. There is a price to be paid for such a courageous move but anything less will perpetuate church structures where devout protagonists continue to whistle splendidly in the dark. Even where there are possibilities of modest brinkmanship it is well to remember that the church must live dangerously if it is to work effectively. We now examine what this shift might entail for Irish Christians.

i. There will be an ambitious widening of the concept of evangelization

Much evangelical zealotry has been afflicted with the statistics syndrome which measures success quantitatively without much interest in the qualitative outcome. We are bombarded with an elitist religious mind-set which is propelled by the success *telos* and which is noted for its catch-cry

on the doors.' Although not universally defective this approach has a serious flaw in that it tends to regard 'contacts' as the objects of spiritual propaganda with little reference to the actual questions and concerns of the person within their community. Unless door-to-door visitation has the visible referent of an incarnated worshipping community, it is likely to be ineffective because of a feeling of detachment on the part of the receptor. From the point of view of the sending group it is often less complicated to commission a band of enthusiasts on an evangelistic enterprise than to become thoroughly involved with the pains, disappointments and frustrations of a single family over a long period of time. There is also the pressure to indulge in 'conscience salving' and this may divert the church or agency away from the deeper meaning of in-depth evangelisation. It may also blind them to self-examination as the following story illustrates. Monica Hill, editor of the *British Church Growth Digest* tells of a pastor who mobilised some of his people to knock on doors with Christian literature as a method of outreach. The first quarter they knocked on 2,000 doors. When asked about the response the pastor replied — "None, so we are going to redouble our efforts. We will knock on 4,000 doors next quarter!"[10]

In many parts of Ireland there is evidence that the only form of Christianity which is likely to capture the interest or arouse the response of the spiritually uncommitted is the 'honey-pot' type rather than the 'missile' type. In the first model people are drawn to a caring base like bees to a honeypot, while in the second they are struck from a defensive base like warriors in a war. Our churches should be sending out scout bees to tell about honey at home rather than firing cold missiles to capture clients for action.

ii. There will be a thorough re-evaluation of conventional methods and emphases

The tendency to canonise the methods and movements of a former era has produced a static dependence on an extraneous paradigm from a former generation. In its most serious manifestation this obsession with the Protestant Reformers, the Great Awakening or the Evangelical Revival, effectively imprisons and restricts the contemporary church in responding meaningfully in the language, thought-forms and life-style of the present world. An unquestioning allegiance to any system of thought or transformative movement is damaging because it encourages the recall of images, models and emphases, deep-frozen in history to be re-heated in the contemporary climate. Because the spiritual palate changes with each generation there may be little appetite for the warmed-over menu of another chef. It will also be discovered that other dishes have been created in the interim which are more attractive to the discerning palate of today. Who would be satisfied with the Pauline attitude to slavery in the light of Wilberforce, or with Luther's treatment of the Jews and the Anabaptists following the pogroms and Nazi holocaust, or with Henry VIII's ransacking of religious houses judged from our modern concept of religious freedom? In every movement and manifestation of spiritual reform and renewal there

were whole dimensions of Christan truth and practice missing, and the church must find a contemporary *raison d'être* and live amongst the questions and longings of the here and now. Richard Lovelace, one of the most creative writers of our time, has presented a cogent argument in these terms:

> *The Protestant Reformers did not clearly point to the Kingdom of Christ as a goal to be pursued beyond the concern for individual salvation. This opened the way for self-centredness to reassert itself after the event of conversion. The Reformation corrected the Catholic understanding of individual salvation, but did not go beyond it to define adequately the collective Christian enterprise. In the same way, the Reformers did not thoroughly grasp the other great collective image of the church, the body of the Messiah. Their treatment of spiritual nurture and growth is still only a corrected individualism, which defines the 'means of grace' simply as 'the Word of God, the sacraments and prayer'. These elements are vital dynamics of spiritual life. But they are not the whole story. Taken by themselves, they convey an image of lonely spiritual individualism which generations of Protestants continue to live out. Puritan Christians, for example, were like spiritual deep-sea divers, each with his or her own air line up to God through the 'means of grace'. Each one intent on private spiritual goals viewed others only dimly through clouded facepiates.* [11]

As Catholicism is being renewed by severing its philosophical dependence on Aquinas so Protestants need to revise their uncritical allegiance to the great movements of a past era. There is the dual danger of operating with the idea that God stopped working effectively after the 16th century or assuming that faithfulness to the Gospel is determined by employing or departing from the methodology of the Reformers. Without devaluing the massive impact of men and movements of the past or abandoning their theology we need to pursue a course of action which is inspired by their leadership but not bound by their stances, methods or emphases. If the *ecclesia semper reformanda* vision of the Reformers is taken on board by the modern churches it will liberate them to respond to contemporary needs in a positive and powerful way.

iii. There will be imaginative and suitable initiatives

If intelligible sounds are to be made by the faith community which will resonate in the minds of those who are being Gospelised there are several thematic adjustments which must be made. In naming some of these concerns we are able to catch a glimpse of the contours of the emerging church. Therefore in positing a vision of an alternative ecclesiology or 'way of being church' we are coming close to the heart of the matter. The robust verbosity of Irish religious communities stands in need of revision. Evangelicalism with its strong emphasis on verbal communication and suspicion of liturgical modes and underuse of the worshipping assembly as

a sign of the Kingdom in the world needs to undergo a traumatic transformation.

(a) Discipleship as an evangelistic goal

Although firmly lodged in the theology of the Great Commission, the emphasis has too often been upon gaining converts rather than making disciples. Orthodoxy reigns over orthopraxy and the assent of the mind to truth is the criterion of genuineness rather than the commitment of the life to love and service. The discipling of believers was an important insight of the biblical Anabaptists who, while assenting to the Lutheran teaching on justification, were uneasy about the idea that faith was all about a change of status before God. This forensic understanding, while thoroughly Pauline, must be supplemented and expanded by the Synoptic and Johannine vision of Christianity as believing the truth but also walking in the Way. The recovery of this emphasis is central to renewal as seen by Jim Wallis:

> *It is highly significant that they were called the people of* the Way. *Christians at the beginning were associated with a particular pattern of life. Their faith produced a discernible lifestyle, a way of life, a process of growth visible to all. This different style of living and relating both grew out of their faith and gave testimony to that faith. To all who saw, Christian belief became identified with a certain kind of behaviour . . . The faith of these first Christians had clear social results. They became well known as a caring, sharing and open community that was especially sensitive to the poor and outcast. Their love for God, for one another, and for the oppressed was central to their reputation.* [12]

(b) The Kingdom as the greatest entity

Much confusion has arisen because of an equation between the Kingdom of God and the Church of Christ. While there is a close relationship between the *basileia* and the *ecclesia* they must be kept distinct. Both Catholicism and Protestantism have been subverted as a result of the failure to see the Kingdom as the wider and superior entity which the Church signifies and promotes. When the church arrogates to itself the prerogatives of the Kingdom the way is open for the destruction of the servant model and its replacement with the ruling one. George Eldon Ladd has set out this distinction in a succinct way:

> *If the dynamic concept of the Kingdom is correct, it is never to be identified with the church . . . In the Biblical idiom, the Kingdom is not identified with its subjects. They are the people of God's rule who enter it, and are governed by it. The church is the community of the Kingdom but never the Kingdom itself . . . The Kingdom is the rule of God, the church is a society of men.* [13]

In Ireland there is a pressing need for ecclesial reductionism so that the

church becomes the bearer and sign of the Kingdom to be corrected and renewed by the wider dynamic of the universal rule of God.

(c) The church as the salvific sign

With the collapse of an institutionalised church model and the abandonment of the Jesus-Kingdom-Church conflation, the nature of the church and its role in salvific encounter must be examined. We are beginning to see the possibilities of the impact of a powerless church which is no longer concerned with exerting authority but in the style of John the Baptist points beyond itself to the King and His Kingdom. In the words of Gutierrez, the church must be involved in the "annunciation of the Kingdom and the prophetic denunciation of oppressive structures" which prevent its coming. In the Irish context the inadequacy of present ecclesial associations is highlighted by Gerry O'Hanlon, who writes of the Northern Irish situation:

> *On the Protestant side this takes the form of allowing God to be interested in a one-to-one relationship with me as a believer, and in a supportive relationship with my group in political life — but at the cost of excluding any interest God might have in the political and social rights of the other group, the non-Protestant, non-Chosen people. On the Catholic side there is a somewhat similar 'writing-off' of God's interest in the world of political morality: God can comfort us in injustice, offer the rewards of the after-life, but is not seriously concerned with our struggle for greater justice in this life nor in our efforts to form community with those outside our own group . . . In a strange way, from different starting points, Protestant and Catholic images of God deriving from this situation converge in presenting a God whose perfection is seen to involve limitation, exclusivity and partiality in such a way that acceptance of individuals and groups that are different is made more difficult.* [14]

If there is to be significant change in the style and thrust of Christian witness in Ireland there will need to be a more comprehensive application of Gospel principles and values to the whole life situation of the recipients. For evangelicals this will require a radical re-evaluation of the approach which considers that social concern is only about writing fat cheques for Tear Fund while ignoring structural injustice locally. This re-orientation would create a better church and in the end make the Gospel more credible because it becomes visible as well as audible.

While the complex needs of Irish communities will not be met by ecclesial re-shuffling, there are many areas of traditional church life which must be re-shaped. Instead of persisting with irrelevant and outmoded structures there is a need for ambitious and imaginative renewal within the corporate family of faith. The old Protestant principle of the 'priesthood of all believers' needs to be taken out of cold storage in many churches where clericalisation is endemic. A whole range of options in polity and leadership within congregational life should be investigated. It is becoming clear that

the homogenous unit principle, which has been a characteristic of many groups and denominational churches, is under great strain in many places. The new wine is bursting the old wineskins and the spillage is beginning to be noticed. As churches start to experience a new pluriformity they are compelled to re-adjust their concept of the Body of Christ as a unit with many and varied parts. Where this happens, in more than a token way, believers form trans-cultural allegiances and multi-racial expressions are able to cohere in creative spiritual growth rather than merely co-exist in conformist religious association.

Part of this liberative creativity will be expressed in the emergence of an alternative society, what John Stott has called "an authentic Christian counter-culture". This is a missing dimension in much Irish Christian practice, where the polarisation has been in the direction of a pietistic, introverted huddle or towards a cultural captivity to the prevailing social and political order. This polarisation can be broken by the emergence of communities of 'loving defiance' as proposed by Ron Sider. These communities would strive to incarnate the servant values of Jesus, to live out the principles of the Kingdom and therefore to offer to society a Christianised order which would be seen as a genuine and attractive alternative. In his book *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy*, Tom Sine envisages the shape of this new spiritual order:

> *Not only are we called to be the family of God celebrating our life together; we are also called to incarnate His new society in the world around us, to prophetically challenge the existing order. That means we are to model together the right-side-up values of Jesus even when that means going against the values of the dominant culture.* [15]

Conclusion

Within the context of contemporary Irish life the foregoing proposals are offered as appropriate Christian responses to the current societal needs. Christian communities and communicators will require persistent sensitivity to the changes which are taking place in Ireland with uncharacteristic rapidity. It must also be remembered that much of the traditional entrenchment remains and that many parts of the country are still affected by the more conventional patterns of thought. Therefore, flexibility is required by all those who are concerned to maintain a purposeful presence and to convey a reconciling word. The churches need to have their sights firmly fixed on the coming of the Kingdom of God and to make it the *terminus ad quem* of their evangelistic and pastoral activity. The final shape that the adumbrations of the Kingdom will assume in any given place or at any given time is not susceptible of exact prediction. It will certainly not

be confined to a past cultural consciousness or conformity. In the words of Charles Kraft:

> *The dynamic of Christianity is not in the sacredness of cultural forms — even those that God once used. The Christian dynamic is in the venturesomeness of participating with God in the transformation of contemporary cultural forms to serve more adequately as vehicles for God's interactions with human beings.* [16]

Such a vision is entirely appropriate for the Irish situation. Although we can only trace the faint outlines of a far-off horizon, there is no need for ecclesial anxiety. The Lord of history is the God of the church — and, thankfully, the architect of the future.

NOTES

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The Church and Politics: Some Considerations Concerning Christianity, Politics, and the Human Community

by ROBERT D. LINDER

Introduction

Americans love politics, but they do not necessarily love their politicians.[1] That is, they do not think highly of politics as a profession. This is revealed in the stories and jokes they tell. Take, for example, the true story of an incident involving Congressman Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania during an election campaign in the United States in the 1850s. Stevens was a well-known politician of the Civil War era. One day while crossing a mud-covered Lancaster, Pennsylvania, street on a wooden plank, he was confronted by his main political adversary coming toward him on the same narrow walkway. His rival called out in disdain: "I never step aside for scoundrels!" Stevens quickly jumped off the plank into the ankle deep mud and bowed, saying: "I, on the other hand, always do!"[2]

Such stories reveal that Americans have never had a great deal of respect for their politicians. Opinon polls confirm this, and they point out a rather schizophrenic public attitude towards politics in general. Most Americans recognize the importance of political activity, but most of them do not want their children to enter the political profession. It is likely that the same attitudes prevail among the British people as well.[3]

But what is the Christian's attitude towards politics to be? Perhaps more Christians, especially those who claim to be biblically-oriented, should be concerned with politics since political issues nowadays are often quite literally matters of life and death. And Christians since the time of Jesus have been concerned with matters of life and death![4]

I should not have to spend much time elaborating on the point that the world is in the throes of a great political and spiritual crisis. I use the words 'political' and 'spiritual' advisedly here because I believe that the two are related. Nearly all of the major crimes facing the world today have both a political and a spiritual dimension: war and peace, freedom and tyranny, terrorism and violence, racial and sexual prejudice, abortion and the right to life, world hunger and poverty, economic justice, the use and misuse of nuclear power, environmental issues — they all illustrate the link between

spiritual and political issues. Unresolved over a long enough period of time, any of these issues can bring a great civilization to destruction.

Writing in 1982, with remarkable prescience before the dawn of the current 'Age of Terrorism,' Ronald Higgins observed:

> *We have somehow created a world of profound and increasing inequalities, in which the top third of our fellow men and women live in restless affluence and the bottom third in degrading poverty. It is a world in which absurd expectations, compulsive appetites and human multiplication are exhausting scarce resources and endangering the land, the waters and the atmosphere. It is a world where deprivation and injustice have become so profound and so public that they make even more precarious the balance of nuclear terror which has become the extraordinary and permanent context of our lives . . . I believe that we must prepare ourselves for a world of rapidly mounting confusion and horror. The next twenty-five years, possibly the next ten, are likely to bring starvation to hundreds of millions, and hardship, disaster or war to most of the rest of us. Democracy, where it exists, can have little chance of survival. Nor in the long run can our extravagant urban industrial way of life. We of the rich world are probably the last comfortable generation. We could well witness the last act in the strange and in some ways glorious drama of modern materialist man. The evidence as a whole strongly suggests that an era of anarchy and widespread suffering is swiftly coming upon us.* [3]

In this context it is easy to see that the inter-relationship between religion and politics is very much a live topic today, perhaps even more so than at most times in the preceding several centuries because of the nature of the advanced technological world in which we now live. In short, if Christians believe that this world is God's creation, then the stakes are high indeed.

Before going further, it is necessary to distinguish between the issue of 'church and state,' on the one hand, and 'church and politics' on the other. The phrase 'church and state' refers to a differentiation between two kinds of institutions that have structured and defined the lives of human beings down through the ages. In this arrangement one of these authority structures — the state — has been primarily concerned with temporal life as an end in itself, while the other — the church — has been concerned with temporal life as a means to spiritual ends. Moreover, the term 'church and state' designates a certain kind of tension implicit in any society that contains these two institutions, even in those in which there is no attempt to separate them. [6]

On the other hand, the issue of 'church and politics' is broader than this, yet without the consideration, except perhaps in the final analysis, of whether church and state should be kept as separate as humanly possible. At issue here is the relationship of the church as an institution — as a collective body, whether international, national or local — to politics, that world concerned with the government of the civil order and with the actualities of daily life. In Western society in the twentieth century, it has

been quite possible for the non-Christian to escape the world of the church, but it is never possible for the Christian to escape the world of politics. It impinges upon him/her at every turn.

Further, in trying to throw some light on this subject, it is necessary to reach back into the history of the early Christian church for insight and instruction. Except for a few die-hard theological liberals, nearly all Christians share the view that the original intent of the founder, Jesus Christ, should be the basis of Christianity in any age and, moreover, that the best way to discover the founder's intent is to examine the pages of the Bible and the history of Christianity during its early years.

Key Scriptural Concepts of the Early Church

The biblical passages below, which provide the scriptural background for this analysis of the church and politics, have been selected with a view toward their historical importance — that is to say, they were highly influential in the early church and have been highly regarded by large numbers of Christians in subsequent years. There are many other appropriate passages, of course, but these have carried unusual weight in the study of political theology in the church.

First of all, there are the political implications of several important passages in the Old Testament books of Amos and Micah. Historically, these have provided the basis for Christian teaching concerning social justice, righteousness and kindness. Thus, according to the prophet Amos, God said: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:21-24). Or examine the words of Micah: "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:6-9).

In addition, Christians should consider the teaching of Jesus concerning God and Caesar. In Matthew's Gospel, it is recorded that the Pharisees came to Jesus with a trick question in order to trap him into giving an answer that was bound to displease either the religious authorities or the political officials, no matter what he said. They approached him, thus: " 'Tell us, then, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the money for the tax.' And they brought him a coin. And Jesus said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said, 'Caesar's.' Then

he said to them, 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard it, they marvelled; and they left him and went away" (Matthew 22:17-22). Although down through history Christians occasionally may have been tempted to render unto God what is Caesar's, they more often have been inclined to render unto Caesar what is God's.

In addition to these, there is Jesus' great teaching concerning neighbour-love to consider. According to the scriptures: "And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, 'What is written in the law? How do you read?' And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have answered right; do this, and you will live.' But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the inndeeper, saying, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back." Which of these three, do you think proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise' " (Luke 10:25-37).

Further, all Christians must understand that their highest loyalty is always to Jesus Christ. When put to the test, the early believers made it very clear where their ultimate allegiance lay. According to the book of Acts, here is how the early Christians responded to an order to cease and desist in their teaching in Jesus' name: "And when they had brought them, they set them before council. And the high priest questioned them saying, 'We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' But Peter and the apostles answered. 'We must obey God rather than man' " (Acts 5:27-29).

In addition, the Apostle Paul pointed out that, as a rule, the state functions as a "minister of good." This is essentially what he taught in Romans 13: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good and you will receive his approval, for

he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrong-doer. Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to thom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due" (Romans 13:1-17).

But the Bible also reveals that the state can sometimes become a "beast." Consider the description of the evil "beast" (the state) as it apparently will function in the last days: "And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a Lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder. Men worshipped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?' " (Revelation 13:1-4).

From these and similar passages of Scripture, the early Christians developed certain principles which, in turn, affected their outlook on the social and political issues of the day. Three such doctrinal principles are still valid for any discussion of the church and politics today. *First,* there is the early Christian teaching that every human being has intrinsic worth as a human being because of the Incarnation. The Apostle John wrote: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). What greater testimony could there be to the fact that God enormously values every human life than the fact that he gave his only Son so that those same humans might have the opportunity to embrace eternal life? The Incarnation itself certainly should speak to the Christian political conscience concerning such issues as pornography and poverty, racism and appalling prison conditions, for all of these things represent a process of dehumanization that is contrary to the value that God has placed on all human beings.

Second, and related to my first point, there is the early Christian view that "human life is sacred." I have tried to make a close study of this matter myself and I am absolutely convinced that this was one of the two or three commonly held social beliefs of the early Christians. It was applied to almost every area of existence where human life was at risk: warfare, abortion, and capital punishment. The shedding of blood was singled out as one of the most grievous of sins by the early church. Also, the believers of those early centuries stood firmly against abortion and capital punishment as contrary to the order of God's creation. As far as I can determine, the early Christian prohibition of killing was absolute. Although I am aware that not all scholars entirely agree with this assessment, especially on the matter of the early Christian attitude toward war and the military, I am persuaded by the weight

of New Testament teaching, and by the work of such historians as C.J. Cadoux, Roland Bainton, Jean-Michel Hornus, and Micheal J. Gorman, that the early church stood firmly against Christian participation in war, abortion and capital punishment. Of course, in that day, they had no recourse to the ballot box or the courts in these matters. However, they opposed these practices and used their influence wherever and whenever they could to work for their cessation.[7]

Third, there is the early Christian view that believers should champion the poor, the needy, and the oppressed. Any serious reading of the New Testament makes this a self-evident truth. Although Jesus never turned away a rich person simply because he was rich, his main concern was with the downtrodden of society. The New Testament radiates a vital concern for the oppressed, or what today would be called "human rights." The post-fourth-century church has not had as good a record on human rights as did the first Christians. For example, many English bishops and a great number of Southern Christians in America in the early nineteenth century argued against the abolition of slavery because it would have violated the principle of property rights, which, according to them, was inherent in the Christian Gospel — a strange view to hold for followers of the Son of God who had nowhere to lay his head. On the other hand, in both England and America, it was evangelical Christians who led the fight against slavery and finally presided over its demise in both countries. These men and women took seriously the Christian obligation to champion the needy and oppressed, and with history-changing results. Certainly, such a teaching should make Christians everywhere opponents of those who exploit other human beings for selfish and degrading purposes.[8]

The Key Historical Event in Christian History for a Consideration of the Church and Politics: The Constantinian Fall of the Church

But something happened to the Christian church which led it to attenuate, modify, and eventually abandon all or part of those early views so heavily laden with political implications. Although not all historians would agree, an increasing number — both Protestant and Catholic — are coming to accept an interpretation of Christian history which includes the notion of "the Constantinian Fall of the Church." This discovery of the significance of the fourth-century conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine I and the subsequent legalization of Christianity in the Empire provides analytical insights which enable one to understand in a large measure what is wrong with modern Christianity. Over the centuries since that valiant beginning nearly two thousand years ago, a great many harmful changes have taken place in the church, changes which historian Jacques Ellul has described as "the subversion of the church."[9] In this, one can see that the key event in

distorting the socio-political outlook of the church was, in fact, Constantine's conversion.

The motives for and nature of the Emperor's conversion are not important for this discussion. Whether Constantine became a Christian because of political considerations or because of sincere religious convictions has been hotly debated. Constantine himself probably did not know. In any case, after his rather spectacular decision to embrace Christianity at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine more and more pronouncedly acclaimed Christianity. Before the fourth century, Christians had been a despised and persecuted minority in the Empire. For various reasons, some internal and some external, they had remained aloof from the society about them, seeking rather to realize the ideals of Christ in small communities which at that time comprised the universal church. However, by the middle of the third century, thousands were pouring into the Christian fellowships. By the turn of the fourth century, when the last great official empire-wide persecution took place, it was too late to stem the tide. There were simply too many Christians and their influence was too widespread. After the conversion of Constantine, the flow turned into such a floodtide that by the fifth century Christianity was not only the sole official religion of the Roman Empire, but also the professed religion of the overwhelming majority of its citizens. It was one of the most spectacular success stories in history.[10]

But, as church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette has pointed out, this impressive victory of Christianity was mixed with a kind of defeat: "The victory had been accompanied by a compromise, compromise with the world which had crucified Jesus, compromise often made so half-consciously or unconsciously that it was all the more serious a peril to the Gospel."[11] For one thing, with the mass conversions which followed the turning of Constantine to Christianity came a relaxation of discipline in the church and the gap between the ideal and the performance of the average Christian widened. Nominal adherence to the Faith became increasingly common and, with it set in a decline in the quality of life among those who now called themselves Christian.

However, perhaps more important for a discussion of the church and politics were the specific changes introduced by Constantine after 312 which made Christianity a favoured — and, therefore, a popular — religion across the Empire. For example, the Emperor granted to members of the Christian clergy the freedom from all contributions to the state, a privilege previously given the priests of other religions that had been accorded official recognition. However, this soon led to a great influx into the Christian ministry of those from the curial class wishing relief from the heavy burdens which were crushing that once privileged stratum of society. This influx required the promulgation of a second edict limiting Christian ordination to those whose exemption would mean little financial loss to the state. In the process, the Christians were likely to get the worst of both possible worlds. Other changes included putting their Christian Sunday on the same legal footing with pagan feasts, and providing new converts to Christianity

with special protection under the law. Constantine himself built and sponsored churches and encouraged his civil officials to do likewise. He also had his own children instructed in the Christian faith, kept Christian clergy in his entourage, and provided Christian chaplains for his army. Finally, he himself took an increasingly active part in the affairs of the church, thus establishing a precedent which many of his successors would like to follow.[12]

The main point here, of course, is that Christianity was no longer a despised and outcast religion. It was now favoured, respectable, and, most important, growing in wealth and power. Favoured by the state, it also accumulated certain obligations to undergird the state. Soon Christianity was cheek by jowl with the state, encouraged by it and, in turn, supporting it. Before long, it became the religion of the status quo and the new civil religion of the Roman Empire. The stage was set for the corruption and deviations of the Middle Ages. Western Christianity would never be the same again!

The Role of the Church in Today's World

But what of the present-day church? Is it by and large Constantinian in outlook and practice? In my judgement, it most assuredly is. Can the church as a body or its various constituent parts shake off this crippling scourge, a scourge which mutes its prophetic voice and makes it difficult to deliver a word of judgment from God? It most certainly can. It has been done before in history and it can be done again!

But, in view of the continuing presence and/or threat of Constantinianism, should the church attempt to provide leadership or express views concerning political issues? That is, should a church body, or an individual congregation take a collective stand on political questions? I see no reason why, within certain limits, it should not. If the Gospel is relevant to the whole of human conduct, then surely the church has something to say about issues which affect so many spheres of human activity. Moreover, the fact that most of the political issues of the day have a spiritual dimension — many of them a spiritual base — makes it imperative for Christians individually and collectively to speak up. In any event, the church seems to be the only institution in Western society today with any kind of absolute values to serve as a basis for social and political reform in a world which desperately needs such reform.[13]

As indicated above, the early church had a great deal to say about the value of every human being, about the sacredness of human life, and about helping the poor, needy and oppressed. Surely, the present-day church needs to recover these concerns and speak out on them. A world gone mad with killing and violence surely needs to hear a word from people who are different, who claim to be "new creatures in Christ" (II Corinthians 5:17).[14]

But, it is also clear that, in order to avoid Constantinianism, there need to be certain limitations on the political activity of any Christian group or

church.[15] Let me suggest five which appear to be in order.

First, it is not wise for the church to participate in partisan politics. Identification with one political party or another or the creation of a Christian Party of some sort automatically alienates large segments of humanity which should not be given the impression that any particular party is God's anointed or that the policies of any particular party are God's policies. For instance, in America recently, the Fundamentalists have created the impression that God is a Republican — or at least that he heavily favours that party. During the 1984 presidential campaign, a joke circulated that *G.O.P.* ("Grand Old Party," a term jocularly coined by the Republican Party around the turn of the last century to describe itself) really stands for "God's Own Party." Of course, like many jokes, this one carries a bite because of its satirical implications. At any rate, it is not spiritually healthy for this kind of identification to take place. The Churh of Jesus Christ, by its very nature, includes all kinds of people from all social groups. Some of these people have a conservative bent of mind and some a liberal bent of mind, while still others are not doctrinaire at all when it comes to political thinking. This means that the church will often include a variety of political views in its ranks.

On the other hand, I know of no reason why individual Christians in a democratic society should not belong to and participate in a political party. Not only do individual believers have that right as citizens of their respective countries to do this, but, like most human institutions, the party most likely can benefit from a Christian presence in its ranks. At the same time, the Christian party member should be careful not to sacralize his/her party or its policies.

Second, the church should avoid the terms "liberal" and "conservative" in advocating political positions or when addressing political issues. These terms do not appear useful in determining a course of action for Christian bodies in the Western democracies nowadays. Often the Christian course of action defies such political labels; and the Christian position may be interpreted as liberal in some instances and conservative in others. For example, in Britain Christians may support prison reform and oppose pornography, because in both cases dehumanization and exploitation are at the root of the problem. Yet the anti-pornography movement is usually considered right-wing while prison reform is usually viewed as left-wing. In America, the peace movement is often considered a liberal cause while anti-abortionists are primarily labelled as conservatives. Yet both of these causes stem from the Christian concern for the sacredness of human life. The point here is that Christians should support a given political position because it is biblical and it is right, and let the chips fall where they may![16]

Third, the church should shun excessive political involvement because this can seriously dilute its religious or spiritual mission and turn it into just another political action committee or party. There is no hard and fast rule to apply here, and certainly there are grey areas where human judgment, based on spiritual sensitivities, must determine a course of action. The first

business of the church has always been evangelism — winning people to Jesus Christ; however, as stressed above, the Gospel has certain political and social implications which cannot be ignored. There is even a social and political dimension to conversion. Christians have never preached the Gospel and then left converts to shift for themselves. To put it another way, Christians should not stand on the Jericho Road handing out gospel tracts and assume that in so doing their faith has been fulfilled and their job done! There is far more to Christianity than that. However, political concern should flow *naturally* out of the preaching of the Gospel and the Christian worldview. There are political issues which naturally call for a Christian response because Christian believers live their lives out in the world. But this does not necessarily call for excessive entanglement in politics, and the church should keep this in mind.

Fourth, the church should never participate in the political process for the sake of power and/or privilege. Power, as Lord Action once warned, has a nasty way of corrupting even the best-intentioned human beings, and it usually whets the appetite for more power. This sort of arrangement, though long practised by many of the churches of Europe in past centuries, is repugnant to the nature of the Gospel. In addressing this question in the American context, prominent Protestant theologian John C. Bennett observed in 1958:

> *It is obvious that the Churches in America should not use their members as political pressure groups to get special ecclesiastical privileges for themselves as against other religious bodies . . . There is a large area here that calls for experienced awareness and vigilance on the part of many units of the Church. It also calls for a sense of fairness that refuses to take advantage of mere power to influence public decisions in the interest of a particular church.* [17]

In short, power and special privilege should not be the motivating factor in any decision by the church to involve itself in a political issue.

Fifth, the church should avoid being co-opted by civil religion. What is civil religion? Civil religion, often called political or public religion, refers to a people's widespread acceptance of perceived religio-political traits regarding their nation's destiny. It relates their society to the realm of ultimate meaning, enables them to look at their political community in a special sense, and provides the vision to tie the nation together in an integrated whole. It is the system of rituals, symbols, values, norms, and allegiances which function in the ongoing life of the community and give it an over-arching sense of unity. In so doing, civil religion stands above and beyond individual denominations and churches. Civil religion is unique in that it has reference to power within the state, but since it focuses on ultimate conditions, it surpasses and is independent of that power. Civil religion makes it possible for the state to utilize commonly accepted religious sentiments, concepts, and symbols — directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously — for its own purposes. It is the general faith of the nation, a faith which mixes

together piety and patriotism until it is virtually impossible to distinguish between the two.

From the point of view of the church and politics, the main danger of civil religion is that it identifies God with the national identity and in essence reduces the universal God of the Bible to the tribal God of a particular nation — like Britain or America. Civil religion appropriates God for national ends and purposes. It does not ask God to judge the nation but to bless its agenda. As American Senator Mark Hatfield, himself a devout Christian believer, observed at a National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. in 1973:

> *As we gather at this prayer breakfast let us beware of the real danger of misplaced allegiance, if not outright idolatry, to the extent that we fail to distinguish between the god of American civil religion and the God who reveals Himself in the Holy Scriptures and in Jesus Christ. If we as leaders appeal to the god of civil religion, our faith is in a small and exclusive deity, a loyal spiritual Advisor to power and prestige, a Defender of only the American nation, the object of a national folk religion devoid of moral content.* [18]

Since Christianity is an international religion which finds its most profound expression in personal faith, it would appear to be incompatible with civil religion — or with any kind of established church, for that matter. Moreover, the church should beware of being "used" by the state for its own ends by participating in civil religion. This point is particularly relevant in a Western democratic society where the government often takes the views of the church seriously and where the culture bears such a heavy Christian imprint. [19]

Conclusions

In summary, as far as I can determine, there is no reason why the church should not participate in politics. However, this has become complicated by the religio-political climate of the post-Constantinian world — a world in which church-state entanglements have been common, a world in which the church still often participates in civil religion, a world in which the church has abandoned its prohibitions against the shedding of blood and the taking of human life, and a world in which the church too often has failed to speak out against the exploitation of people and on behalf of the poor, the needy, and the oppressed.

Like any worthwhile undertaking, there is the danger of over-emphasizing the political aspects of the responsibility of the church to the world. However, there does not appear at the present to be any danger of the church's becoming too concerned about the threat of nuclear war or too deeply involved in championing human rights or too wrapped up in attempting to protect the unborn. Still, it is well to remember that the Church should temper its approach to politics with an exemplary non-partisanship that avoids excessive involvement simply for the sake of involvement.

Moreover, the church should never participate in politics with the aim of gaining power and privilege for itself, and it should avoid the spiritually-deadening effects of being co-opted by civil religion.

However, when all is said and done, the fact that the Gospel has a social and political dimension cannot be ignored. As noted at the beginning of this essay, the world today is long on problems and short on answers. The church does not have all the answers, but it certainly has a number which a secular world needs to hear and consider. To choose self-destruction after hearing the Christian message is one thing — to choose it without hearing it is another. The church should have something meaningful to say to the current world situation. At stake are the fundamental issues of justice, mercy, and peace that fill the Bible from cover to cover.

NOTES

1. This is a revised version of a lecture originally delivered at a meeting of the Irish Christian Study Centre, Belfast, Northern Ireland, April 25, 1986. I wish to express my thanks to the staff and members of the I.C.S.C. for making the occasion possible.
2. *Time*, Sept. 21, 1981, p. 4.
3. For example, see George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971*, 3 vols. (New York: Random House, 1972), I: 484, II: 1157, 1314, and III: 1927. For some rather acid comments concerning the lack of moral leadership among twentieth-century British politicians, see Matthew Parris' review of *The Gladstone Diaries* in *The Sunday Times*, May 4, 1986, p. 50.
4. For the argument that believers can and should be involved in politics, see Robert D. Linder and Richard V. Pierard, *Politics: A Case for Christian Action* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973).
5. Ronald Higgins, *The Seventh Enemy: The Human Factor in the Global Crisis*, rev. ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), p. 12.
6. For more information on the subject of the separation of church and state, see Robert D. Linder, "Church and State," in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), pp. 233-38.
7. C.J. Cadoux, *The Early Christian Attitude to War* (London: Headley Brothers, 1919); Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960); Jean-Michel Hornus, *It Is Not Lawful for Me to Fight* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980); and Michael J. Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish and Pagan Attitudes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982). For an example of a historian who appears reluctant to accept this conclusion, even in the face of his own evidence to the contrary, see Robert M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine: The Thrust of the Christian Movement into the Roman World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 303-5.
8. For example, see Roy Joslin, *Urban Harvest* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1982); Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation and World Evangelical Fellowship, *Evangelism and Social Responsibility* (London: Paternoster Press, 1982); David Sheppard, *Bias to the Poor* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983); and John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1984). For the application of the social dimension of the Gospel to Northern Ireland, see Sidney Garland, "Liberation Theology and the Ulster Question," *Foundations*, no. 15 (Autumn 1985): 31-33; reprinted in this issue of the *Journal of the Irish Christian Study Centre*.
9. Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). Original French edition, 1984.
10. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), pp. 65-111, and F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (London: Paternoster Press, 1958).
11. Latourette, *History of Christianity*, p. 108.

12. For the full story, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), pp. 484-88, and 554-71.
13. For examples of how and why Christians, as individuals and in groups, can be active in politics in a democratic society, see Linder and Pierard, *Politics,* esp. pp. 17-51, and Richard J. Mouw, *Called to Holy Worldliness* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980). For a stimulating discussion of the pros and cons of the involvement of the church in politics from a distinctly British perspective, see Donald Reeves, ed., *The Church and the State* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984).
14. The effect of the discipline of the Medieval Church on Europe in the days immediately following the disintegratioon of the Roman Empire, the impact of the Puritan movement on the development of moral self-discipline in personal life and the growth of individualism, and the influence of the Wesleyan Revival on the moral thinking of eighteenth-century British people are all examples of how Christianity has significantly affected the political growth of the West in the past. For excellent accounts of how evangelical Christians in recent centuries have contributed to social and political reform, see Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work, 1865-1920* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1977); and Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War,* rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).
15. For a brief but helpful introduction to the problem of Constantinianism in the context of the New Religious Right in America, see Richard V. Pierard, "The Religious Right in American Politics," in George M. Marsden, ed., *Evangelicalism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 161-74.
16. Related to this is the issue of joining with non-Christians in order to achieve some political objective important to Christian believers. Provided that one has a goal firmly based on biblical revelation, I see nothing wrong with cooperating with others of different faiths or of no faith at all to obtain the desired ends. After all, much of what Christians stand for is based on broad considerations of justice and social welfare which appeal to the consciences of many outside the church.
17. John C. Bennett, *Christians and the State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 272. I realize that this is also sometimes a difficult position to maintain, especially in borderline cases. As a matter of fact, most cases are not borderline, though some are. Moreover, in many instances there is a Christian inspiration growing out of the doctrine and ethos of the church behind the conscience of the community, and there is no problem if the effects of this Christian inspiration are shared broadly by the community. Further, the church should seek to educate the community on matters concerning which its conscience is dull or uninformed.
18. The text of this statement is reprinted in Mark O. Hatfield, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976), p. 94. Senator Hatfield made these remarks with then-President Richard M. Nixon sitting at his right hand.
19. For a brief introduction to civil religion, see Robert D. Linder and Richard V. Pierard, *What is Civil Religion?* (Washington, DC: Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, 1986). For a full discussion of civil religion in the American context, including its benfits and dangers, see Linder and Pierard, *Twilight of the Saints: Biblical Christianity and Civil Religion in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978).

Liberation Theology and the Ulster Question

by SIDNEY GARLAND

Religious, political and cultural divisions in Northern Ireland have erupted into the most prolonged period of violence that the State has known since its formation in 1921. The alienation of the two communities is very deep and the Ulster Question has brought both frustration and fear to successive British Governments. Many lives have been maimed or destroyed, while countless hearts have been broken and homes shattered as a result.

A higher proportion of the population in Ireland, Protestant and Roman Catholic, attend church regularly than in any other country in Western Europe, and yet hopes of reconciliation and a lasting peace in the community are very low. Around the world the cause of Christ has been dishonoured by the conflict in Northern Ireland, while in Ireland itself, both north and south, there is an increasing drift from the Church.

Those churchmen who have been most vocal have not always displayed a spirit of love, understanding or reconciliation, preferring a polemical spirit which has often fuelled the fires of an idolatrous nationalism in both communities. One evangelical has recently challenged those who respect the scriptures: "How much genuinely biblical thinking has been done about the underlying causes of the troubles?"[1]

New Challenge

A new challenge to Christian thinking has come from the impact of Liberation Theology. This has come to Ireland mostly through the influence of Irish Roman Catholic missionaries. The Northern Ireland problem is believed by some to be a close parallel to some 'third world' situations where Liberation Theology is developing. International capitalism and British imperialism have, it is claimed, oppressed and exploited the Irish people but have failed to extinguish their desire for the completion of the liberation of Ireland, a task only begun by the Easter Rising of 1916. The following dialogue with Liberation Theology can be profitable if the result is a deeper understanding of scripture and of the contemporary needs of our society, and a renewed desire to live out the will of God, thus making the love of Christ visible.

Problems of History

Some understanding of the history of the Church in Ireland will give helpful background to our present situation.

When the Reformation came to England there followed some half-hearted attempts to establish the Reformation in Ireland. The Irish language was not used in the services and the scriptures were not yet translated into Irish. The Church historian, James Seaton Reid, laments the practice of "employing exclusively, as the agents of this work, the natives of a kingdom against which the Irish were deeply and justly incensed. By this means the reformed religion became unhappily identified with England."[2]

Queen Elizabeth had little zeal for the spread of the gospel, but her Irish wars led to the extension of English rule in Ireland. When the last of the Gaelic chieftains fled to Europe in 1607, their vast estates were confiscated and granted to English and Scottish settlers. This seizing of Catholic lands has been resented ever since and has left behind a structural inequality where it is usually Protestants who own the most and best of the land.

The Plantation population experienced a gracious period of revival in the 1620's. However, this had little effect on the native Irish and the brutalities of the 1641 rebellion increased the settlers' feelings of insecurity and the development of what has been described as the siege mentality. Cromwell did his utmost by a combination of military force and evangelism to overthrow the Catholic Church in Ireland. However, the general result of his policy "was to deepen the gulf between Protestant and recusant (Catholic), and to strengthen the recusant's conviction that they would never be safe under a Protestant Government."[3]

It is of great interest to note that there was a period of Irish history when many Presbyterians had common cause with Roman Catholics against the injustice of the 'penal laws' which discriminated against both and in favour of Ireland's small Anglican élite. The significance of the unsuccessful insurrection of 1798 led by the United Irishmen has lived on in the hopes of Irish Republicans that it would be possible to unite Catholics and Protestants in the pursuit of an Ireland free of English rule. This tradition of revolutionary violence has never wholly died out in Ireland.

However, by the nineteenth century, Presbyterian radicalism declined and a defensive mentality prevailed as the Protestant community rallied to protect their Protestant ascendancy. Last century also saw a major effort by English evangelicals to evangelise Ireland. This so-called 'Protestant crusade' was no doubt motivated by a genuine concern to free Catholics from the burden of their sin but also by a desire to bring the blessings of British civilisation to the Irish. Their efforts had only limited success and one of the unintended results was to stir up community conflict and to increase hatred of England.

The anti-British feeling of many Irish Catholics was sadly confirmed by the Great Famine of the 1840's. It is estimated that as a result of the Famine one million people died. Though many English evangelicals responded

generously to the relief of need, the English government acted hesitantly and half-heartedly. Such were the tensions of the time that Protestants who offered aid were falsely accused of using relief measures as a means of bribing Catholics to turn to Protestantism.

Other factors which brought division were separate schooling, the association of Gaelic culture with Catholic nationalism and the campaign for Irish independence or home rule. The Ulster Protestants believed that 'Home Rule' would mean 'Rome Rule'. Despite their invocation of divine aid and their expression of loyalty to the Crown, the 200,000 signatories to Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant pledged themselves to "use all means" to defeat Home Rule. They were in fact preparing themselves to defy the constitutional authority of the British Parliament.

The eventual partition of Ireland satisfied the Protestants of Ulster but seemed to be a surrender to violence, a thwarting of democracy and an injustice to the nationalist (Catholic) population in Northern Ireland. In spite of early clashes, the 1922 Settlement brought a degree of tranquility which was the opportunity for the healing of old wounds.

The Present Troubles

By the 1960's the lot of many people in Northern Ireland was improving and yet this was the time when the present conflict began. It has been pointed out that revolt has come in many societies "not at the time of greatest deprivation but a time of rising expectations".[4] The rising generation of Catholic young people, stimulated by student activism in the United States, France and Germany, inspired by the American Black Civil Rights movement and frustrated by the conservatism and sectarianism of the Stormont government, now began to organise a mass movement of opposition to the government.

By focusing only on the violence which resulted, many Protestants too quickly condemned this movement and dismissed its concerns. However, the charges of discrimination in employment, housing and electoral practices, though exaggerated, cannot be totally refuted. Faced with a moderate reforming programme, the government dithered while the initiative seemed to go to the extremists on both sides. Extreme 'loyalists' condemned every reform as a victory for violence and a step towards the destruction of the State. Extreme republicans saw every delay in reform as further confirmation that they would never achieve justice in the Northern Ireland state. Both sides included men who were prepared to take up arms to advance their cause.

The Development of Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology is a movement which is attempting to develop "a new way to do theology"[5] from within the context of oppression and human need. Beginning with the 'scientific analysis' of the social reality, the theology of liberation seeks a new understanding of God as the One who sides with

the oppressed and calls His Church to work for radical change in the world. Though it is primarily associated with Latin America, the theologians of many countries, facing different kinds of oppression (racism, sexism, etc.) are contributing to the development of the theology of liberation. For this reason it is now more accurate to speak of the theologies of liberation rather than merely the theology of liberation, though both terms continue to be used. There is now an enormous and still expanding literature on the subject.

Liberation Theology has grown out of the 'sinful situation' of the poverty and underdevelopment which has clearly been perpetuated by western countries for their own advantage. The Catholic Church has historically been linked to the oppressive forces of colonialism and the ruling élites. The Catholic hierarchy has in various ways opposed the new ideas which have nevertheless continued to develop, especially in the Catholic Church.

A group of radical Protestant theologians developed in their thinking "from a predominantly Barthian theology to a theology of God's transforming action in history greatly indebted to Paul Lehmann and Richard Shaw until Ruben Alves gave it creative expression in critical dialogue with Marcuse on the one hand and Moltmann on the other."[6] God was said to be present in the struggle for humanisation and the Church was urged to join him and become a 'revolutionary church'.

Two strands within Liberation Theology are represented by two Catholic priests who have each had a profound influence upon the movement. One of them, Fr. Camilio Torres, was shot dead on 15 February 1966 by government forces while leading his band of guerillas. The other, Archibishop Helder Camara of Brazil, has been described as "an aggressive and practical pacifist".[7] He himself spoke of the 'spiral of violence' which in turn provides more violence and repression. Camara believes that armed revolt is legitimate but impossible and prefers to speak of 'peaceful violence' and claims kinship with Martin Luther King.

Liberation Theology claims to be a universally valid way to do theology and says that "the task of Christian theology, wherever it may be developed, is the systematic effort to re-read history from the viewpoint of the rejected and humiliated."[8]

A Theology for Ireland?

A wide variety of Irish theologians (clerical and lay) have begun to interact with Liberation Theology and to endeavour to develop it or build on it in the Irish context. At a conference on Liberation Theology organised by the Student Christian Movement, a Dublin priest called on the Church to take a political stance against the injustice and deprivation experienced by the Dublin slum-dweller. Another lecturer, John Maguire, described the Irish economic situation in terms of neo-colonialism and foreign exploitation. In his view this system is maintained by an extremely authoritarian government with very strict emergency powers and by "a church that is

extremely conservative politically".[9] Maguire makes no apology for his Marxist outlook.

Paedar Kirby has written extensively on Liberation Theology and is extremely critical of the Catholic Church for being out of touch with the social needs of its people. On Northern Ireland Kirby is critical of the Church for not analysing the structural causes of the conflict and for assessing the situation in a static way: "there is a lot of violence. Violence is not Christian" and the result of this is that "the Church has no role in this problem because there is no historical analysis of what has been causing these problems."[10]

Michael Garde, a Protestant layman, attacks loyalists such as Rev. Ian Paisley because he "takes the Province of Ulster as a given absolute which can be separated from the whole history of Ireland."[11] Garde, clearly sympathetic to Liberation Theology, views the situation as one dominated by British imperialism and an Orange State which cannot be reformed.

Enda McDonagh, Professor of Moral Theology at Maynooth, takes a much more critical approach to the Marxist influence on Liberation Theology. He wonders if there is any country in the world where Marxism "actually led to the liberation of a dependent people and not to a new form of slavery."[12] A much more wholehearted supporter of Liberation Theology is Fr. Joe McVeigh. He contends that the Church must be on the side of radical, social and political change and that "the image of a middle-class clergy cannot be justified".[13] He says that "the Christian response to the conflict in Northern Ireland . . . must be along the lines suggested by Liberation Theology."[14] He favours a "consciousness-raising" type of education rather than the bomb and the gun as the way to achieve the new society.

The man who has gone furthest in adopting a liberationist stance is Fr. Des Wilson, a controversial figure who lives in an ordinary house in one of the most deprived areas of West Belfast. Wilson strongly supports Sinn Fein, the political party which supports and justifies the armed struggle of the IRA. While his own bishop has warned Catholics not to vote for Sinn Fein, Wilson commends the party as "the reasoned choice of a dignified people".[15] He claims to be following the example of Archbishop Helder Camara in "refusing to condemn those Christians who took arms in their struggle for justice." Wilson believes that "what the British Government is doing in Ireland is unjust, vicious and degrading"[16] and asserts his view that "there is no way out of this impasse except by some kind of force."[17] Wilson himself would hope for some kind of non-violent direct action but he is convinced that something radical will have to be done, and the sooner the better.

The Distinctive Method of Liberation Theology

In making a more detailed assessment of Liberation Theology the following features are clearly prominent:

A Call to Praxis

The scriptures challenge the Christian to "do the truth" (1 John 1:6) and to "not merely listen to the word" (James 1:22). We know that the gospel must be worked out in terms of concrete action and that orthopraxis is just as vital as orthodoxy. However, for Liberation Theology *praxis* is more than the point where belief issues in action. It "takes much of its meaning from its use in Karl Marx as the call for response arising out of the historical movement."[18] Praxis is a particular kind of response and involvement; it is a participation in the class struggle to bring about the creation of a new socialist society. This is the kind of praxis which must come *before* reflection and the development of theology. It is the new starting point for hermeneutics. Theology is then placed at the service of this prior commitment to socio-political liberation.

Fear of Abstraction

Liberation Theology says with some justification that traditional theology has been privatised and abstracted from historical realities. To avoid this danger of abstraction, theology must be rooted in the human and therefore in the political dimensions of life. Christians must realise that they must not and indeed cannot escape politics.

The Role of Ideology

A central feature of the theology of liberation is the conviction that there is no ideologically neutral theology or exegesis. Liberation theologians reject the ideologies of the status quo, and opt for an ideological commitment to the oppressed which for most of them means Marxism.

Basic Flaws in the Theology of Liberation

However much we may learn from Liberation Theology, it is essential if we are to develop a scriptural theology, to enter the following caveats:

Use of Scripture

The Liberation theologians do not give to the scriptures the primacy and authority which they demand and deserve. The Bible is often used, but more as a book of illustrations than as the sole authority in matters of faith and conduct. It seems that the text is swallowed up by the context and scripture is not allowed to judge the theology or the Marxist philosophy tied up with it. The 'Christian feminist' and Liberation theologian, Rosemary Ruether, asserts that the text, the Bible, becomes "a document of collective human failure rather than prescriptive norm".[19] The Catholic Church, which for centuries withheld the Bible from its people, now uses the Bible but without inculcating respect for its authority and infallibility.

View of History

The theology of liberation has an optimistic and Marxist philosophy of history. The Marxist has a certain discernment of the future, a faith linked

to the inevitable march of history, brought about by 'the revolution', which is of course, just around the corner. This can lead to justifying anything since the revolution must succeed. The Sovereignty of God, the Fall, the Cross and the Second Coming of Christ are of little significance in this view of history.

Externalisation of the Gospel

With Liberation Theology we must reject the tendency to privatise and spiritualise sin, and to emphasise the vertical at the expense of the horizontal. This has resulted in church members who are "all too naive about the injustices of the present social order and too comfortable within the womb of the consumer society".[20] However, Liberation Theology is in danger of so externalising the gospel that it seriously neglects the vertical God-ward aspect of salvation. By hitching their wagon to the Marxist train, the liberationists are in danger of repeating Marx's failure:

> *He failed both to plumb the depths of alienation (as estrangement from God) and to follow the perfect orthopraxis of the Creator's Son. Instead he bequeathed to an unjust world a powerful locomotive of revolutionary activism, but only the most frail of ethical tracks to run it on.*[21]

Ideological Captivity

Liberation Theology rightly warns us of the way in which religion can be turned into an ideology of the State. However, Liberation Theology itself has become captive to an anti-Christian ideology. Without disputing the value of a partnership between theology and sociology, we must reject any supposed neutrality in sociology, least of all Marxist sociology with its Enlightenment view of man. Professor Harvie Conn points out that "Marxism as a tool builds on a metaphysical definition of man as bearing within himself the power to subject to himself the whole of reality and to bring it under his own humanising regime".[22] By this means God is pushed aside, the Bible is prevented from saying anything unsaid by Marxism, and the door is open to a new Pelagianism, that is, man's advancement by his own efforts.

Liberation Theology's Challenging Agenda

It would be all too easy to dismiss Liberation Theology and so neglect the challenge of working out a theology which applies the gospel to every area of life and culture. René Padilla, an evangelical theologian in Argentina, asks: "Is not the radical leftist theology itself, at least in part, a reaction against the deadly reduction of Christian mission that has characterised Latin American Protestantism? In our aloofness from social analysis and interaction on the problems people face is there not what amounts to a de facto fundamentalism of the Right?"[23] The sections that follow are attempts to bring aspects of the Gospel to bear on issues people are facing in Ireland and around the world today. The agenda is wide open.

Liberation and Salvation

One of the most common slogans daubed on the walls of Belfast is "Ireland unfree shall never be at peace". One of the most violent of the terrorist factions takes the name 'Irish National Liberation Army'. But what is freedom? What is true liberation? One of the most basic problems with Liberation Theology is its confusion of biblical salvation and political liberation. For example, Gutierrez says that in the "struggle against misery, injustice and exploitation, the goal is the creation of a new man".[24] This is both a biblical and a Marxist expression, but with quite different meanings. The "one new man" of which Paul writes is God's creation by Christ's death and God's gift to those who are personally in Christ (Eph. 2:15, 16; 2 Cor. 5:17). This cannot be the same as the 'creation' through Marxism of a new social order for all men, whether Christian or not. Liberation Theology is essentially committed to universalism. Gutierrez asserts "the universality of the salvific will of God".[25] The message is that God is going to save everyone. By the inevitable processes of history all men are heading for salvation and liberation. Those who jump in the stream (of political action) now will be carried along all the faster by God's liberating current. Gutierrez says that "man is saved if he opens himself to God and to others, even if he is not clearly aware that he is doing so".[26]

This equation of salvation with political liberation is similar to the definition of salvation which prevailed at the WCC Assembly in Bangkok in January 1973 and entitled "Salvation Today". According to the Assembly report: "salvation is the peace of people in Vietnam, independence in Angola, justice and reconciliation in Northern Ireland . . . "[27]

Gutierrez goes so far as to say that "The God of biblical revelation is known through interhuman justice. When justice does not exist, God is not known; he is absent."[28] This is a distortion of the biblical doctrine of grace. We can agree that a true knowledge of God must issue in love and justice towards our neighbour, but to put it the other way round "is uncommonly like a doctrine of salvation by good works".[29] Harvie Conn rightly warns that "Roman Catholic theology, throughout its history, has compromised that *sola fide* message with its 'grace, plus' bypass. Within Liberation thinking, is that 'plus' not now being reinforced?"[30]

Liberation Theology's inadequate doctrine of grace is matched by an inadequate doctrine of sin. Des Wilson is typical of many in holding an unbiblical view of the goodness of man and viewing all men as "redeemed by Christ".[31] Though Liberation Theology is right in showing that sin is more than an individual matter, a merely private or interior reality — that it has corporate, social and structural dimensions — nevertheless its view of sin remains dangerously shallow. As Carl Braaten reminds us:

> *Sin provokes the wrath of God; it is slavery to Satan; it is a state of spiritual death; it is a disease of the whole person — a sickness unto death. It is a state of corruption so profound that the elimination of poverty, oppression, disease, racism, sexism, classism, capitalism, etc.,*

does not alter the human condition of sinfulness in any fundamental way. [32]

Human Rights and The Christian View of Man

The present troubles began with a campaign for civil rights. This gave opportunity to some who were opposed to the very existence of Northern Ireland to begin a campaign of violence. As the government tried to clamp down ever more severely on the violence, so concern shifted from civil rights to human rights — concern about powers of arrest, internment without trial, the treatment of suspects, allegations of torture, prison conditions, non-jury courts, and the use of paid informers. The result has been more alienation from respect for rule of law.

Christians have been very slow to get involved in either civil or human rights issues, tending to concentrate their attention on the most wicked atrocities carried out against innocent people by terrorist forces. There has been little understanding or sympathy for the sense of grievance widely felt in the nationalist community.

In discussion of rights we need to get back to the basic question of the Psalmist: "What is man?" (Ps. 8:4). The Bible teaches that man had a distinctive origin which set him apart from all the rest of God's creatures (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7). Man's nature is also unique: he is made in the image of God, both male and female, made like God and to relate to God as a covenant being, responsible to God (Genesis 1 and 2). When it comes to the implications of this for human rights we can echo the words of the Lausanne Covenant (1974):

Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. [33]

These principles should make Christians more willing to contend for the rights of others, especially the under-privileged, the weak, the unborn. The late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones warns us that "looking at history, it seems to me that one of the greatest dangers confronting the Christian is to become a political conservative, an opponent of legitimate reform, and the legitimate rights of the people." [34]

As far as political or democratic rights are concerned it is surely time for Unionists to consider whether the invocation of 'majority rule' is the way to do justice to the aspirations of around 40 per cent of the population. On the legal front the use of uncorroborated evidence of paid informers has been challenged by many. A Reformed Presbyterian writer, Neville Kerr, on the basis of texts such as Numbers 35:30, Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16 and 1 Timothy 5:19, concludes that "the supergrass practice, insofar as it leads to the conviction of men solely on the uncorroborated evidence of a self-confessed criminal is in direct conflict with the principles given to the Children of Israel by God." [35]

Revolution and Christology

Our society faces a carefully planned and totally ruthless campaign of violence, sometimes indiscriminate, sometimes directed against so-called 'legitimate targets' such as policemen, prison officers, judges and politicians, and sometimes directed against prestige targets in England. The aim is to secure 'British withdrawal'. However, this is seen as only the first step towards the revolution and the eventual establishment of an All-Ireland Cuban-style socialist republic. As Michael Garde explains:

> *The Provisional IRA . . . see themselves as freedom fighters finishing the work of de-colonisation which was uncompleted at the beginning of the century . . . A necessary consequence of the Provisional's nationalistic religion is the genocide of the Protestant people they are trying to force into a united Ireland.* [36]

One of the sad realities of the Northern Ireland situation is that there has been equivocation on the part of some clergy on the issue of the use of violence in this present conflict. Des Wilson has clearly shown his sympathy for the IRA's campaign of terror. He protests about the whole system of government as "institutionalised violence". He says that the churches routinely condemn violence but he says "the churches have adamantly refused to define what they mean by violence. To them violence is when the poor guy in the street goes and gets a gun and shoots somebody, but violence is not when people are driven into exile, are driven into unemployment, deprived of adequate means of livelihood or deprived of their dignity." [37] But Wilson is ignoring Paul's teaching in Romans chapter 13. He resorts to the just war theory to try to justify his position, arguing that the revolution has hope of success and that a mandate has been given to the revolutionaries by the oppressed people. However, his own bishop, Cahal Daly, has refuted this argument showing that the 'war' is unjust because it lacks the support of the vast majority of Irish people, it treats the Protestants of Northern Ireland as non-people, and it uses methods which are barbaric. [38]

The theology of liberation has put forward a new approach to Christology which has serious doctrinal and practical effects. Liberation theologians have rejected popular Latin American images of Christ (as either vanquished and helpless or celestial monarch and remote), believing that these images have been manipulated by conservative forces to prevent change in society. Without doubt the repudiation of unbiblical traditions must be repudiated. However, the Liberation theologians have inherited from European theology a scepticism about the possibility of any sure knowledge of the Jesus of history. The result of this scepticism about the sources of Christology is that Liberation theologians are in danger of being among those who "depict Jesus in their own image". [39] As a result they are left with a Jesus who was a mere man who sided with the poor against the Establishment — a revolutionary Christ who is far from the Christ of the Bible, the Christ who is God Incarnate (John 1:14) and God with us (Matt.

1:23), the Christ who told His disciples in the Garden to put away their swords (Matt. 26:52) and who said to Pilate "My Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight" (John 18:36).

Poverty and the Kingdom of God

One of the most disturbing challenges of Liberation Theology comes when it awakens our conscience to the extent of poverty in the world and also the depth in which this theme is treated in the Scriptures. High unemployment and years of bad housing especially among the Catholic urban population have contribued to a sense of hopelessness and alienation from the State and society in general. This has undoubtedly contributed to the violence in Northern Ireland just as similar disadvantages experienced by the black community in England have contributed to urban riots. This is not to condone or justify what has happened but to try to understand.

Evangelicals have at times been guilty of a middle-class internalisation which avoids the impact of the biblical message. We have spiritualised 'poverty' into an interior problem. However, Liberation Theology has gone to the opposite extreme by an externalisation which puts all the emphasis on social alienation, social-class conflict and economic deprivation, viewing all the poor as on God's side. For Liberation Theology "the movements of the poor can be seen as signs of the Kingdom, as places where God is working in history".[40] Herman Ridderbos points the way to a more biblical understanding when he suggests that the poor

> *represent the socially oppressed, those who suffer from the power of injustice and are harassed by those who only consider their own advantage and influence. They are, however, at the same time those who remain faithful to God, and expect their salvation from His Kingdom alone.*'[41]

Jesus made it plain that He expected His followers to identify with the poor and to fulfil their obligations to the poor. This requires us to do more than verbalise our concern for the poor. We need to develop a more simple lifestyle. We need as individuals and as churches to consider ways of helping to change structures which contribute to poverty. Ministers and many other Christian people must face up to the challenge of remaining in or relocating to the areas of greatest need. As John Perkins points out: "Many of our neighbourhoods cannot be improved until there are people living there with the skills, the talents, and the resources that can make the difference."[42]

Every effort must be made to bridge the gap between the Church and the poorest of society. David Sheppard says that Christians must begin with service to the community and realise that the time for naming the name of Christ "may be ten years down the road, when the neighbours have had the chance to see signs in the life of the Christian community".[43] However, I believe there is a grave danger of substituting social activism for evangelism, and so we will 'sell people short'. Surely we cannot wait ten years to tell the poor the good news remembering the way Jesus integrated word and deed

in His ministry? It was reported of the labours of Christ that: "the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Matthew 11:5).

The Church and its Role in Ireland Today

The Calling of the Church

Each church must ask itself: How far does our church fulfil its calling to be 'salt of the earth' and the 'light of the world'? For Gutierrez "any claim to non-involvement in politics — a banner recently acquired by conservative sectors — is nothing more than a subterfuge to keep things the way they are."[44] One of the greatest needs in Ireland today is for churches who will display the *koinonia* in the New Testament Church, loving one another, serving the world, rejoicing in the power and the grace of the Spirit.

Prayer

We are under constant pressure to substitute activity for prayer in our own lives and in the life of the church. Prayer is the cry of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (for putting things right) (Matt. 5:6). As we look at the world in its fallenness we are to cry out like widows asking persistently for justice before the "unjust judge" (Luke 18:1-5). We must acknowledge that the task of winning souls to Christ and of gaining victory over the powers of darkness and injustice is too big for us and so we must make prayer our top priority.

Social Responsibility and Evangelism

One of the benefits of the debate with Liberation Theology has been the way in which evangelicals have re-assessed the relationship between social responsibility and evangelism. Depending on the situation and depending on our gifts and function in the body of Christ, it may be right to concentrate on one or other of these two Christian duties. Although evangelism relates to people's eternal destiny and the supreme need of all men is the saving grace of Jesus Christ, yet it has been well said that "seldom if ever should we have to choose between satisfying physical hunger and spiritual hunger, or between healing bodies and saving souls, since an authentic love for our neighbour will lead us to serve him or her as a whole person."[45] Positively we can agree to the validity of the Grand Rapids Report view that social activity is a consequence of evangelism, a bridge to evangelism and a partner to evangelism. The same report helpfully distinguishes between social service (relieving human need, works of mercy) and social action (removing the causes of human need, the quest for justice). There is much scope for individual Christians to get involved in both kinds of activity, sometimes combining with other Christians and sometimes getting involved alongside non-Christians as co-belligerents to advance a particular cause. In Northern

Ireland the pro-life organisation LIFE has provided a sphere where Protestants and Catholics have come together as concerned citizens working for the common good.

The churches in Northern Ireland have had a rather narrow social involvement, focusing mainly on issues such as temperance and Sabbath observance. In his recent study on the gospel and the working classes, Roy Joslin challenges the church to widen its concern and to become "a friend to the lonely" (widows and orphans, senior citizens, the single-parent family), "a defender of the powerless" (poverty, race, discrimination) and "a champion of the oppressed" (unemployment, fair wages, and human working conditions).[46] Although the title *deacon* may not have been applied until later, Acts 6 supplies us with a model for diaconal ministry which could be applied today to the administration of many church-based ministries to the needy. Johannes H. Verkuyl in a very thought-provoking study of the role of the diaconate lists some specific projects: "freeing people from addictions, advancing meaningful community, bridging the gaps between conflicting groups, struggling against unemployment, and serving justice".[47]

Conclusion

Liberation Theology uncovers the urgent need for Irish evangelicals to do more listening, to see ourselves as others see us. Then with a deepened understanding of the scriptures and a renewed appreciation of our own Reformation heritage, we must begin to put aside the siege mentality and reach out across the barriers of alienation. We must communicate Christ by word and deed in ways which will not be misunderstood. In view of our responsibility to imitate the incarnation (Phil. 2:5ff) we must face up to the challenge of renunciation of status and pride, of independence and of immunity from trouble. The Ulster Christian should be more concerned for the rights and interests of others than his own. Professor Fred S. Leahy, a Reformed Presbyterian minister in Northern Ireland, challenges the Protestant majority to "recognise the distinction between their legal, democratic right on the one hand and their Christian obligation on the other."[48] While his suggestion of a federal solution to Ireland's problems may be far beyond the realm of practical politics, there are ways in which this spirit of reconciliation and self-sacrifice could be shown in Northern Ireland. It is no compromise of our Reformation heritage to admit that Protestants have been guilty of prejudice, discrimination and violence against Roman Catholics. Fears about the long-term future of Northern Ireland should no longer be fostered and exploited in order to excuse the failure of the unionist community to give the nationalist community a generous share in governing Northern Ireland. It is time to confess with Dr. Clifford Smyth that Protestants have "added fuel to the tinder of frustrated nationalism by their complacent disregard of the aspirations of the Roman Catholic minority in the North, and their neglect of the spiritual needs of Ireland as a whole".[49] We must confess that evangelicals have been guilty of "a spirituality without discipleship in the daily social, economic and political aspects of life"[50] and

that "very often our quest for doctrinal truth has not been balanced with a desire for the grace which characterised the Master we seek to follow."[51]

The task before the Church in Ulster today is urgent and daunting. And yet there are encouragements to be found. On many occasions the patience and prayers of God's people have held us back from a Lebanon-type conflict. Ulster continues to be one of the most privileged countries in the world in terms of the strength of the cause of Christ, and Ulster has been blessed with remarkable times of revival in the past. The Christians of Ulster would do well to ponder the considered opinion of Charles Finney that "revivals are hindered when ministers and churches take wrong ground in regard to any question involving human rights."[52] And yet in God's mercy the number of evangelical preachers has been increasing over the past fifteen years.

I am convinced that genuine hope for Ulster and Ireland today is not to be found in a Liberation Theology which is ideologically captive to revolutionary Republicanism, nor in a narrow Fundamentalism which has married the Gospel to Ulster unionism, but in a biblical Calvinism which calls all men to repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ and asserts that all of society and all of culture must submit to the claims and authority of Jesus Christ.

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REVIEWS

Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life

Edited by J. H. CHANNER,

(Paternoster Press, 1985, 151pp, £2.95)

Life in the Balance. Exploring the Abortion Controversy

by ROBERT N. WENNBERG,

(William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985, 181pp, £7.95)

As you read the titles of these two books you may immediately close your mind, already convinced that there is no need for more books on abortion. Christian bookshops certainly seem to be saturated with anti-abortion literature. But wait! How much do you personally know about the abortion controversy? It is an issue which Wennberg, the second author, believes to be 'the most morally provocative and intellectually intriguing of all the moral issues involving killing that confronts contemporary society'.

Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life consists of a series of essays examining the topic of abortion from the perspectives of Medicine, Law, Philosophy and Theology. The opening essay on medical aspects of abortion gives a fairly lucid description of foetal development *in utero*. However the medical viewpoints as to the risks of abortion to the mother in Channers and Wennberg's books are in disagreement. In the former the author interprets the facts with innate prejudice. While admitting that the dangers of abortion are being reduced daily, he still claims that damage due to abortion is inevitable and can be permanent, with the uterus never recovering. In contrast Wennberg cites scientific evidence to show that the frequency of mid-trimester spontaneous abortion among women who have had one previous abortion is the same as that for women having their first pregnancy. In Channer's book even this opening essay, which one might expect to be objective, uses language which often appears to be chosen primarily to arouse an emotional response. For example, the essayist claims 'It does not matter at what stage you kill "child unique" be it immediately after fertilization, before viabiliity has been achieved, just before birth or after birth. At whatever stage the deed is done "child unique" is killed.' Such

language judges the issue before the relevant arguments are discussed. As to the objectivity of the statement, whatever one's beliefs about the origins of personhood, not many people accept that a fertilized egg is of the same value as a newborn baby. Yet, when these ideas are couched in such inflammatory language the Christian public is prejudicially swayed in favour of this viewpoint. Another example of this emotive type of language is seen in relation to abortion after rape. Here the essayist, a specialist in moral theology, contends that 'Having failed to repel his (the rapist's) assault must she (the victim) now be content to let the fruit of his victory rule over her life and grow inside her body . . . It is an unjust intruder. The sin of the father is visited on his child and deprives it of its right to life'. Quite apart from the language, does this argument strike you as in keeping with the spirit of the New Testament? In fairness, a quite different viewpoint is held by the essayist discussing Personhood and the ethics of abortion. Having argued that the foetus is a human being from the point of fertilization and that abortion is morally tantamount to murder he is consistent in making no exception in the case of rape-induced pregnancy. He suggests that this foetus possesses a natural right to intra-uterine life equivalent to that of the foetus conceived with the consent of its mother.

On the credit side Channer's book contains several very interesting essays; in particular one on the use of the Bible in the debate about abortion. Here the author accepts that the Bible does not directly mention abortion anywhere. He also appreciates that over-zealous advocates of the pro-life viewpoint have used (or misused) Bible passages in ways repugnant to Christians who are not hard-line fundamentalists. He cites several instances of this to support his opinion. Having thus won over this latter Christian group, he argues against abortion from the demands of the biblical imperatives of salvation, rather than by literally applying individual texts. He appeals to Christians simply to emulate God's love, believing that the natural outcome of this will be a resistance of the destruction or cheapening of human life. Another essay which I found interesting was one on abortion and early Christian thought. It gave a very succinct synopsis of the beliefs of the church fathers on this issue.

Throughout Channer's book I found a propensity to project personal prejudices alongside valid facts. An entrenched conservatism amongst many of the essayists prohibited them from letting facts speak for themselves. To strengthen their arguments they tended to extrapolate to the future and speculate on its possible terrors. For example the much used 'thin edge of the wedge' argument was often in evidence. In one instance the claim was made that by aborting the foetus today the life of the handicapped or those children with a low IQ would be in jeopardy tomorrow! I personally find such charges irresponsible and unhelpful, only serving to cloud the issues under debate.

In conclusion I must admit that I was disappointed by the selection of essays edited by Channer. To my mind there was very little newness of either

content or approach to separate this book from the wealth of anti-abortion literature already available.

In marked contrast it was a refreshing experience to read *Life in the Balance, exploring the abortion controversy* by Robert N. Wennberg. Wennberg is a Professor of Philosophy at Westmont College, Santa Barbara and writes out of an evangelical Protestant tradition. However this does not prevent him from dealing with the abortion controversy in a clearly objective and unbiased manner. His non-crusading presentation has immediate appeal. Here, as in Channer's book, the moral, ethical, biblical, theological and legal aspects of abortion are examined. However, Wennberg's approach is quite unusual because he sets out the merits of arguments, both for and against abortion so that the reader can judge for himself.

As well as focusing on the Christian arguments, Wennberg applies himself to a broad range of argument which will interest the secular community too.

I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in a serious examination of the abortion issue. Wennberg's purpose in writing is to give all the principal arguments a fair hearing, and I think he achieves his goal. He concludes that 'the considerable complexity of the abortion issue suggests that a measure of uncertainty is appropriate in whatever position one adopts'. Wennberg's book certainly makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the abortion controversy.

SHEENA LEWIS

The Catholic Faith
by RODERICK STRANGE
(Oxford University Press, 1986, £3.95)

The Catholic Faith, by Roderick Strange, is basically a doctrinal primer designed for the inquiring student who ambles up to him — an Oxford University chaplain — and asks, 'What is it you Catholics believe anyway?' The refreshing absence of scholarly clutter and the author's unpretentious style ensure that the serious inquirer will at least find Dr. Strange's answer to the question. Whether that answer will find universal approval is, however, another matter. For the book is also aimed at those Catholics unnerved by the spectre of uncertainty that has haunted many minds since the advent of the Second Vatican Council. Some have profound anxieties about theological change; others a sentimental hankering after the moral certainties of a bygone day. To both Dr. Strange has much to say in his concern to restate traditional Catholic dogma in a way that makes sense to late twentieth century men and women.

The central Christian doctrines of incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection are introduced with confidence and conviction — reminiscent of the reassuring tread of the proverbial village bobby. These chapters are solid, but not stodgy. And if on occasion the pitter-patter of proof-texts

stutters a shade too loudly, these are more than compensated for by the anecdotes and analogies that greatly enliven the argument. Here indeed the preacher's craft shines brightly through. In an age of doctrinal malnutrition it *is* good to have these fundamentals of the faith unapologetically, but winsomely, presented.

Having sketched out the contours of these central Christian convictions, we are led deeper into exclusively Catholic territory. The nature of the Roman Catholic Church, the papacy, sacramental life and the Mass in particular, and the theology of Mary are chief among the landmarks now on the horizon. Here Dr. Strange approaches his task with a candour that apologists for other Christian traditions would do well to imitate. Self-criticism in religious writing is like the bitter lemon that brings out the flavour of good fish. So Dr. Strange does not hesitate to meet head on nastiness wherever he finds it. The loose morals and shady finances of past papal regimes, for example, are squarely faced. Besides, throughout these pages, the author is, if anything, prepared to err on the side of ecumenical generosity. His treatment of the emergence of the doctrine of papal infallibility in the context of a loss of the Vatican's temporal power introduces a tantalizing note that might have been sounded more frequently. His claims for papal authority, therefore, tend towards the minimalist side, so much so that some may well feel that he has extracted the teeth of the dogma altogether. Similarly liberal-minded is his exposition of the Mass, where differences between the Christian traditions are played down, and his tentativeness about Catholic teaching on contraception. Still, Dr. Strange does have the gift for making you feel that if you don't see things quite his way, you are neither impious nor perverse.

For all that, a real Catholic heart beats beneath the veneer of benign ecumenism. Old chestnuts like transubstantiation, the immaculate conception and bodily assumption of Mary, baptismal regeneration, Purgatory, and priestly celibacy show no signs of cracking. On these he is graciously inflexible. Nor does his exposition of the Christian mainstream suffer from the stultifyingly scholarly anxieties about myths and modernism that have long plagued Protestant liberals. Here we encounter a full-blown supernatural Christianity. Not that miraculous events, like calming the storm or cursing the fig tree, are consciously paraded; they are just quietly assumed.

As an introduction to the Catholic faith, Roderick Strange's book presents the best face of the urbane partisan. The difficulty this reviewer faces is therefore not so much with *how* the case is treated, but with the case that has to be treated. Curiously enough it is the very admirable mixture of tentativeness and assurance that creates most problems. Where he is tentative, he will do little to persuade the unconvinced. Where he is assured, many will feel he has obscured the full biblical teaching on the triumph of grace. For many traditional Irish Catholics, I suspect, Roderick Strange affirms too little; for non-Catholics, he claims too much.

DAVID N. LIVINGSTONE

The Role of Women
Edited by SHIRLEY LEES
(IVP, 1984, 224pp., £4.95)

This book is one in the recent IVP series 'When Christians Disagree' which tackles issues over which there are strong varying opinions in the church today. (Others in the series are concerned with Pacifism and War, Creation and Evolution, Charismatic Gifts and Politics).

In each of the books the structure is similar. A reasonable starting position or set of 'theses' for approaching the topic is outlined at the beginning. The contributors agree or disagree with these premises and endeavour to set out a Christian position as they see it. At the end of each chapter there is a response from someone of a different point of view and the book concludes with a summary in which the main points are clarified.

The Role of Women considers firstly the area of woman as wife and mother under the titles of 'Woman in the home' (article by Elizabeth Catherwood), 'Headship in marriage: the husband's view' (David Field); then 'Mankind: male and female' (Valerie Griffiths), and 'Husband/wife relationships: a practical Christian viewpoint' (Michael Griffiths). James Hurley, Daphne Key, I Howard Marshall and Joyce Baldwin then look at women's ministry in the church (but not at the issue of ordination, a wise omission which was 'deliberate so as not to overshadow the wider issue of "ministry" ' p 18).

For both the traditional and less traditional viewpoints in these two areas, the writers consider the biblical evidence and then seek to apply it. The book succeeds in highlighting some of the key areas of disagreement which have resulted from different interpretations of scripture and will be a good guide for someone considering the topic for the first time.

For me the outstanding article was the one by Michael Griffiths, who begins by saying that the series allows him 'to express a strong viewpoint, knowing that it will be balanced by a different one' (p. 96). The depth of feeling with which he writes and communicates, not at all to the exclusion of biblical argument, concerning what he calls a practical Christian viewpoint on the question of husband and wife relationships, is most welcome. It 'scratches where the itch is' and perhaps will be acceptable because it has been written by a man. Curious? Why not read it for yourself!

This series looks very promising and is very much to be welcomed for its honest tackling of today's thorny issues which, nonetheless, acknowledges the very real differences of opinion held by Christians. If healthy discussion does not produce an agreed view, hopefully the spirit of the series will mean we will indeed see 'the need to re-examine our view in the light of Scripture and to exchange views, so that we may ensure that our position is not the product of wishful thinking but is really faithful to the Bible' (p. 5).

This is particularly crucial in considering the role of women — a realm

in which the church should be leading the way rather than recoiling from too much non-Christian feminism and so refusing to face up to these issues that, to our shame, it has taken such movements to bring to wide attention.

FRAN PORTER

Philosphy of Religion: Thinking about Faith

by C. STEPHEN EVANS

(IVP, UK, 1985, 192pp, £3.50)

The last decade has witnessed a resurgence of interest in the philosophy of religion, from philosophers and theologians alike. In this period I have noted approximately twenty new introductions to the subject. Dr Evans' book is the latest addition to an area of study in which evangelicals (Plantinga, Wolterstorff, Helm, Abraham, etc.) are increasingly making a contribution. In general this indicates that the linguistic (A.J. Ayer) and theological (K. Barth, and Ritschl before him) vetoes on metaphysical claims are now, and in my view quite properly, discredited.

C. Stephen Evans is Editor of the series, 'Contours of a Christian Philosophy', in which this book is included. He should be already familiar to those interested in philosophy for his earlier studies: on Existentialism; on the loss of the concept of 'personhood' in the Human Sciences; and on *Subjectivity and Religious Belief* (Eerdmans, USA, 1978), a more technical work, in which the section on Kant particularly impressed me. This present work will probably arouse the greatest interest, since its subject matter and introductory nature are well suited to the requirements of theological colleges and seminaries.

Evans provides a clear and informed introduction to the chief issues of the philosophy of religion. He examines the traditional philosophical 'proofs', and the more modern argument from religious experience, for God's existence. He investigates the credibility, meaning and significance of revelation and miracles; the nature of religious language, and helpfully reviews some modern scientific, ideological and philosophical objections to theistic belief. Finally he considers how religious pluralism relates to individual commitment (*contra* John Hick and W.C. Smith). One surprising omission is consideration of the after-life. Evans is acquainted with the 'classic' philosophical discussions of religion (Aquinas, Hume, Kant, etc.), as well as the more modern treatments. Of the latter, he is clearly indebted to Mavrodes, Swinburne and Mitchell. He follows Mavrodes in his discussion of religious experience and what constitutes validity and proof

in rational theology; he follows Swinburne and Mitchell in their probabilistic inductive justifications of God's existence.

A weakness, and one which necessarily applies to all introductions, is that some topics receive inadequate and superficial treatment, e.g. neo-Wittgensteinian interpretations of religion, revelation, the ethics of belief, i.e. the proportioning of commitment to evidence and mysticism. However, in other places Evans shows the rare talent of presenting quite complex philosophical arguments within a brief compass such as, for example, his discussion of Norman Malcolm's version of the ontological argument or his use of interpretative judgements and the development of a cumulative case in philosophy.

The book is well produced and inexpensive, and would seem an adequate and economical introduction to the philosophy of religion. It is intended for those of little acquaintance with modern philosophy, and it well succeeds in this aim; for those with more knowledge the introductions of Yandell, Gaskin and O'Hear are to be preferred.

L. PHILIP BARNES

Idols of our Time
by BOB GOUDZWAARD
(IVP, 1984, 115pp., £2.50)

'We live in a world possessed. And we know it.' These are the opening words of this book and succinctly convey its main thesis. In eight short chapters Goudzwaard outlines the hopelessness of the present world situation with its bankrupt ideologies, and makes a specific policy proposal to bring hope. There is also the constant theme that these ideologies have a demonic background, a view which some may find difficult to accept.

He outlines the essence of ideology briefly, and suggests that 'an ideology arises when idolatry takes root in the pursuit of a legitimate end.' (p.20). He calls ideology 'the conduit of idolatry' (p. 23) and suggests five trademarks of a mature ideology.

The major part of the book is concerned to demonstrate by means of the five trademarks that the four chosen ideologies are indeed ideologies: revolution, nationalism, material prosperity, and guaranteed security. Tying the book together, Goudzwaard emphasizes the complementarity of opposing ideologies, and finally points out that the only hope of breaking the Arms and Economic Spirals is the Christian hope.

This is a short and extremely readable book, but it lacks penetrating analysis. To be fair, the book does not purport to be a comprehensive treatment of the subject. One idea that I found unconvincing was the notion that God would automatically bless nations that renounced the dominant world ideologies in favour of biblical norms. This view was taken for granted, but I would have preferred some attempt to support it from

scripture. It is all too easy, and fashionable, to apply certain Old Testament ideas to contemporary nations.

All four ideologies dealt with have relevance for Christians in Ireland. The idolatry of material prosperity springs readily to mind (not that we would ever admit to it), but there is also an insidious nationalism among evangelicals. I do not think the concluding 'specific policy proposal' will be taken seriously by many world leaders, but this book will have achieved something if large numbers of individual Christians are challenged to begin to rethink their own lifestyles.

PETER F. WHYTE

And God Came In
by LYLE DORSETT

(Collier Macmillan, 1983, 167pp.)

Lyle Dorsett's book *And God Came In* brings the often shadowy figure of Joy Davidman vividly to life. The magical love story of Lewis and 'that American lady' is known to many, but Dorsett here treats her to a serious examination in her own right. The intellect, creativity, mental agility and sheer humour of the lady come across in no uncertain terms, as do her tough assertiveness and dogged determination.

Although born into a Jewish home, Joy learned to think of herself as a purely material girl at a very early age. The proud intellectualism and almost impossible expectations of her father placed both a strain upon and a challenge before this exceptionally precocious youngster. And so, at the age of eight, she pronounced herself an atheist. Ill health further alienated her from her peers and thus she was thrown back more and more on her own mental resources and creative imagination. Irrestistibly drawn to fantasy in literature and to Christian symbol for poetic expression, she was later to realise that this was all part of her unconscious search for God, even while vehemently holding to secular rationalism.

Dorsett painstakingly takes us through her life, detailing for us, on the one hand, her academic and literary distinction, and on the other her unhappy marriage and domestic misery which drove her to seek the God who 'had always been there'. Her subsequent voracious appetite for spiritual knowledge had to be satisfied, and thus she turned to the works of C. S. Lewis. Soon after began their correspondence. In Lewis she encountered someone with whom she could really communicate, both mentally and spiritually. Dorsett suggests a sense of inevitability about their eventual intimacy, if not their marriage. He stresses their calming effect on one another, stemming, no doubt, from their similar mystical experiences — something by which most of the world would be baffled. He does not sentimentalize this relationship as some have been tempted to do; Joy is presented as a woman of genius but not without her faults. One feels that

Dorsett's research has led him to an ardent admiration of the woman while still retaining a healthy degree of detachment.

The interpretative voice of the author may occasionally be irritating but this book is a must for anyone wanting to understand the true balance of the Lewis/Davidman relationship. It will evoke varying emotions towards its subject, culminating ultimately in unstinted admiration for her courage and spirit in the face of indescribable suffering and, eventually, death. Lewis, as seen from this perspective, also 'comes out of hiding', emerging much more as a man, a human being, not just the literary genius who draws us irrestistibly into Narnia or coaxes us to faith in his apologetic.

FRANCES LIVINGSTONE

Obituary

Alan Flavelle was a man of great gift and generous spirit, singularly devoted to Christ and his Church.

He served two pastorates in Mourne, Kilkeel, and Finaghy, Belfast, with distinction and considerable prowess. But while his years in Mourne were noteable and productive, and had a profound effect on the whole community, it was his Finaghy ministry that marked the maturing of his powers and impact.

Here in a mixed urban setting he grappled with the relevance of Gospel and Church in Ireland today. His struggle led him in sermons, addresses, papers, discussions and conversation

— to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ over history, politics and life

— to warn that what stares us in the face today in Northern Ireland is the judgement of God. 'We turn to God for help when the foundations of our life are shaking only to discover that it is *he* who is shaking them.'

— to bemoan the tragic dichotomy between faith and life which has been brought about by shallow and superficial teaching over the years and is now endemic to the Northern Ireland Christian scene

— to insist in face of monstrous indifference and smart cynicism that prayer, above all else, can bring about a radical change in the present tragic situation. 'Eager to fight God's war with man's weapons . . . the disciples fumble with the weapon that counts' (Earle Ellis).

The life of the Church also deeply concerned him. And this concern persuaded him increasingly to stress the nature of the Church's ministry as preeminently a ministry in, through and by every member. This every member ministry he implemented in Finaghy with much success.

But basic to every member ministry or 'body life', he believed, lay the necessity of adequate training for those who professed to be Christ's which would enable them not only to play their part as responsible and adult members of the Church but to articulate their faith and live it out in daily life — witness his introduction of Adult Christian Education in Finaghy.

Two other recurring themes in his ministry which should be mentioned were:

(1) *the cruciality of worship*

Worship for him was that which gave the life of the Church not only its motivation and inspiration but provided the context for the teaching of the Word and its authoritative and gripping application.

(2) *the importance of evangelism*

'In a world in which the very foundations are being shaken, in which all

faiths, all ideologies are called in question, in which is it loudly proclaimed that God is dead and that man's existence has ultimately no meaning — the one and only important theme is surely to proclaim the gospel of the loving God and to call men to that repentance which leads to newness of life . . . And does that not imply that direct personal evangelism comes first and that the issues of life in society are secondary? Can a new and better society be built with men who have no faith, no hope?' (W. A. Visser't Hooft).

Alan Flavelle, though, was not only a leader in his own Church and denomination. His allegiance was first and foremost to the universal Church of Christ, and therefore he involved himself in the Keswick Convention movement, OMF, visiting Indonesia on their behalf, and with UCCF (formerly IVF) and other similar groups. Indeed he was never more at home than with students, for they gave him the opportunity to propound, lucidly and forcefully, the truth of the gospel and its implications for life, and to share his worries about and hopes for the cause of Christ in our world.

Hence he warmly and actively encouraged the allied work of the Irish Christian Study Centre in its desire to promote a Christian critique of the assumptions, values and standards of our day in thought, politics and life, and to formulate a Christian response to the challenges they present for faith and our obedience to Christ.

Then at the height of his influence, so it seemed, he was struck down with illness. He fought fiercely and valiantly, refusing to give in until 'he was no more, because God took him away' (Gen. 5:24).

To God be the glory, and to Anne, his wife, and his loved ones, our sympathy and prayers.

J. BRIAN MOORE